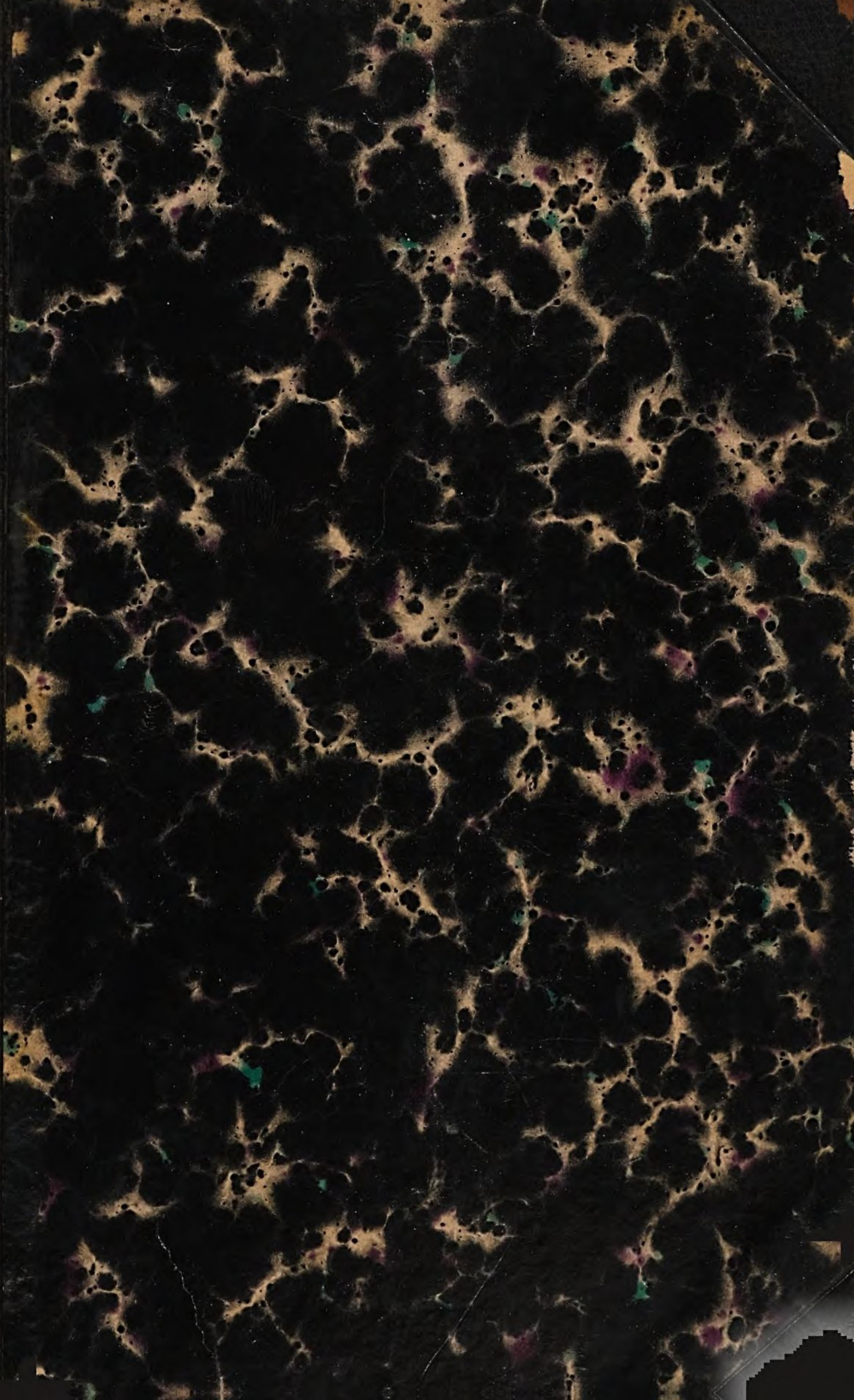


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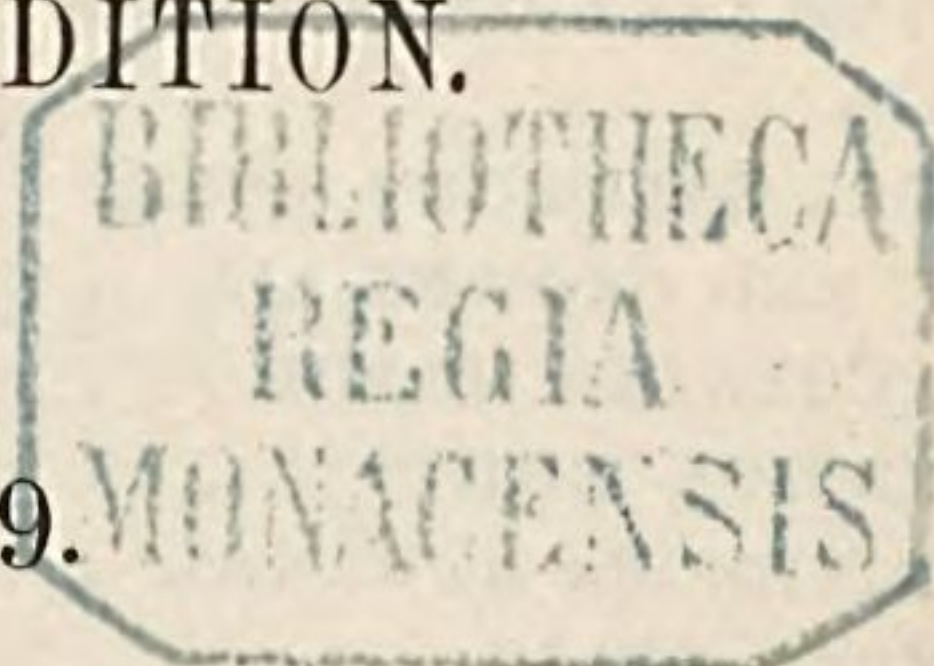
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THE PARSON'S DAUGHTER

HER EARLY RECOLLECTIONS
AND HOW MR. ROMNEY PAINTED HER

A STORY

BY

EMMA MARSHALL,

AUTHOR OF "UNDER THE DOME OF ST. PAUL'S," ETC. ETC.

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BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1899.

THE PARSON'S DAUGHTER

HER EARLY RECOLLECTIONS

AND HOW HER ROMANTIC FANTASY BECAME

A STORY



PREFACE.

IT probably becomes more or less a habit with writers of fiction to watch the people who surround them in the life of the present day; to divine characters from faces, and to imagine the histories that have left their record on features and expression. In the following story, however, my mother elected to let her fancy dwell, not on persons whom she had seen in the flesh, but on a group of men, women and children who lived in the later years of the eighteenth and the beginning of this century, whose faces and forms still live for us to-day on the canvases of Gainsborough and Romney, and are as familiar as those of their own relatives to all who haunt the National Gallery and love to pay their tribute of admiration to the masterpieces of English Art.

Around some of these masterpieces my mother was busy weaving her tale in the spring of this year when she was attacked by illness and her pen was laid aside for ever.

As the greater part of the story was written, it was thought better that I should carry it to completion than that it should be published as a fragment. Though a labour of love, my task has been a difficult and necessarily a sad one. I would therefore ask the indulgence of the reader for any shortcomings and defects that may be apparent in the concluding chapters of Marjorie Willoughby's narrative.

BEATRICE MARSHALL.

HAMPSTEAD, *4th October* 1899.

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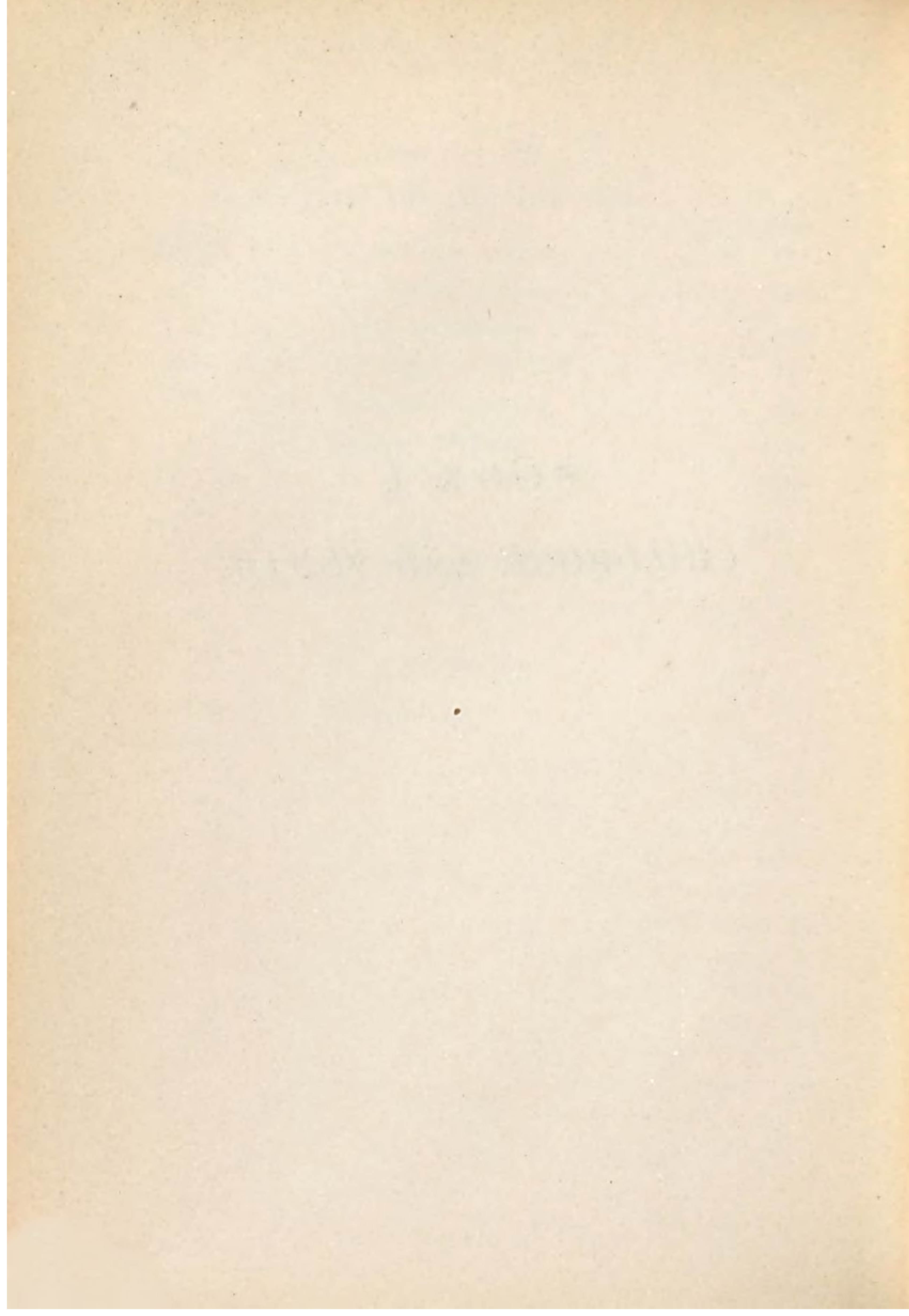
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BOOK I.

CHILDHOOD AND YOUTH.



THE PARSON'S DAUGHTER.

INTRODUCTORY.

My little lame friend Phyllis Vernon was standing one day before my portrait, taken in my youth, by Mr. Romney.

"Grannie, were you like that picture?" she asked.

"They said so; and I daresay I was."

"It is so pretty," Phyllis said. "I wish I might wear my hair in a fluff like that, under a becoming green snood."

It was the early Victorian time when Phyllis uttered this wish, and hair was straight and combed on either side of the forehead, in some cases looped round the ear.

"Grannie, you often tell me stories of your young days. Why don't you write a book, and let everyone read it, about the heaps of grand people you have known, and all the fun and frolic you had when you were like that picture?"

Phyllis Vernon called me grannie; but we were only very distantly related to each other. Her mother had asked me, two or three years before this time, if I would

invite her poor child to stay with me, to try if the Bath waters would effect a cure of her hip disease.

Her mother brought her, and left her for a visit—she said, a short visit—but the visit has lengthened out to three years, and as I do not think my little, quiet darling is wanted in the London house, where her tall, handsome sisters are in the constant round of gay society, I keep the child with me, to her great contentment and my own.

Except for these distant cousins, I have no relations. I stand alone, as far as kith and kin are concerned, but I have friends—good and kind friends—who come to my house in King Street and take tea, and have a game of whist or backgammon when they have no more attractive engagement.

But I am not writing of the present. My little Phyllis's words about the portrait of me—the parson's daughter—have made me think I might find it a pleasant task to write, what I have often told Phyllis, of my childhood and youth at Bradford-upon-Avon—the picturesque old town, from which the small cure my father held was scarce more than two miles distant.

As I look back upon life's journey I see many sunny places where memory loves to dwell. Dark places of sorrow there are, also—for life is a chequered scene to most of us; and I think the sunny places should be uppermost in our thoughts, for surely we have all to thank God for our days of happiness, and, it may be, too, for our days of sorrow, if we have learned to know and feel, and not only to say, that all things, not some things, have worked together for good.

Phyllis writes a fair, clear hand, and it will be a

pleasant task, she says, for her to copy my manuscript into a book. I have one ready, bound in red morocco and closely lined. This will preserve my recollections for any who may care to read them.

I have scribbled a diary for many years, but only at intervals. I was roused to begin it by reading Mr. Evelyn's diary, and then stopped for a time, for who, I thought, would care to read of my doings? But I began again when, after some years, I found myself again in Bath, and there saw and heard that wonderful woman act and speak—Mrs. Siddons.

This is only introductory, and I must not enter into details. Little Phyllis will grow impatient, for she is eager to begin to write, and is practising writing on leaves of old copy books.

I will begin at the beginning, as the children say, and go back to my earliest remembrances. It is the heritage of old age to have a clear vision of past days—clearer far than of the events of yesterday; and I think I have that gift—if gift it is—for I can recall my first awakening to the consciousness of life, that is, of my own little part in this big world. Although my old diaries help me not a little, I do not repeat them as they are written, but, as I hope, improve on the crude, disjointed style in which they were originally composed.

CHAPTER I.

CHILDHOOD'S REMINISCENCES.

I DO not know how old I was when I went down the path of loose gravel leading to the gate of the Parsonage, alone. I had made my escape from the kitchen, where our one maidservant was busy shelling peas, and having put me in a little wicker chair protected by a board, had given me some pods to play with.

Through the open door I saw the garden gate was unclosed, and I was seized with a desire to pass through it into the lane, where clusters of wild roses were hanging in great profusion. I stepped down from my perch noiselessly, and trotted off on my errand of exploration. The sky above my head was blue, and flecked with snowy clouds. What was up there? How could I get there?

I forgot my desire for the roses in looking up at the sky. I sat down on a mossy bank on the side of the lane nearest the Parsonage, and thus I was hidden from sight. The blue sky and snowy clouds had been over my head many times in my short life, no doubt, but I had never thought of them before. It was an awakening, baby as I must have been, to a faint dreamy idea of Heaven and angels, and God, who lived with them. Presently a voice near me said,—

“Here’s the parson’s little daughter, I declare!” and

a man with a kind face took me in his arms, and carried me back to the house.

I remember a fit of crying followed, and I was put to bed as a punishment. My father coming out of his study inquired what was amiss, and I heard Tilly say,—

“She is a very naughty girl, your reverence. I took my eye off her for a minute, and she ran off alone. Mr. Orpin found her in the lane.”

This was the beginning of my friendship with the parish clerk of Bradford. Not that it progressed quickly, for I do not remember more about him till 1784. I was seven years old. Then on my birthday, for a treat, Tilly took me with her to Bradford to buy me some gingerbread, made in the shape of horses, with big comfits for eyes; and others, supposed to be soldiers, with little bits of barley sugar for swords, and high helmets of candied sugar, with strips of red paper cut into a fringe at the top. I remember that seventh birthday well. It began to rain, and Tilly took shelter at the clerk's house, and left me there till she had finished her shopping.

Mr. Orpin was a notable personage in Bradford. He was considered a fine scholar, and read the alternate verses of the Psalms in Bradford Church in a very edifying fashion.

“May I make bold, sir,” Tilly said, “to leave little Mistress Marjorie with you?”

“What! The parson's little daughter? I am proud to have her company.”

“It's my birthday,” I said. “I am seven years old, and my father gave me a locket this morning.”

The locket had been fastened to my neck with a bit of narrow ribbon. I tugged at it to bring it out

from the folds of my kerchief, and displayed it with great pride.

"See, Mr. Orpin," I said, "that's my mother's curl of hair inside, and it's tied with a teeny bow, with a teeny pearl in the middle."

"Bless your little heart!" Mr. Orpin said. "That's a true lover's knot. I expect his reverence gave his lady the locket when he was courting her, and when he lost her he put the hair in to keep her in mind."

"Do folks forget the dead?" I asked.

"Well, there is an old saw which says 'None are so soon forgot as the dead,' but I am loth to believe it."

"That's a big book of yours, Mr. Orpin," I said.

"Ay, it is a big book, and a good book, I can tell you."

The book was resting on an oak desk. There was a large marker hanging from it over the back of the stand.

"This book is one of my best friends, missie. I have a lot of others, as you may see, on the shelf, but the Bible comes first."

"Tell me about them, Mr. Orpin, and show them to me."

"Here's one full of pretty cuts that will please you."

The clerk drew me towards him, and, opening the book, showed me a picture—a rough woodcut on the first page.

"What a hump that is," I said, "on the poor man's back."

"Ay, and a heavy one, too, but he loses it before long. This book is called *The Pilgrim's Progress*, and it was written in prison by one I've heard called 'the glorious dreamer.'"

I can recall now how intently I listened as Mr. Orpin told me of the gate of the city—the gate of Heaven, and how the dreamer saw in his dream the gate opened, and heard the sound of many voices singing a welcoming song to those who passed in and then they were seen no more.

The rain had stopped, and the sun had come through a big bank of clouds, their edges all crimson and gold. To my childish eyes this looked like the city of which Mr. Orpin spoke.

“Ah!” he said, “little missie, one day we will have another talk about that book.”

This was the beginning of my friendship with Mr. Orpin. It became one of the treats of my lonely childhood to get Tilly to walk into Bradford with me. Many of these walks and visits are lost in the haze of years, others stand out clear and distinct, as if they happened only yesterday.

I soon discovered that my friend the parish clerk was considered a personage of distinction, and that a great painter had some years before made a picture of him sitting at that desk with the book open before him. Our own little village had no such distinguished clerk. My father used to say, “poor Crabbe’s day was over,” and yet he didn’t like to tell him how often he read the wrong verse in the Psalms, and repeated what my father had already read.

Old Crabbe was naturally a bit jealous of his neighbour’s notoriety, and told me he might as well have been painted by the great man, for he didn’t see he was a bit better looking than he was.

I demurred at this, and said, though unwilling to hurt Crabbe's feelings as to his personal appearance,—

“You see, Crabbe, Mr. Orpin is a scholar, and he's heaps and heaps of books.”

“What is the good of 'em? He don't read the prayers and Psalms better for it, and that's the point.”

There could be no doubt that Mr. Orpin and his grandchildren had excited a good deal of jealousy in the district, when, some years before I was born, Mr. Gainsborough had come from Bath, and found subjects for his skilful brush in the parish clerk and his grandchildren.

As our friendship grew, and by coaxing Tilly, I was often allowed to stop at Mr. Orpin's cottage while she pursued her way to the shops or market at Bradford. I heard many stories of the great painter, and how it came about that Mr. Orpin had been painted by Mr. Gainsborough.

“He was very partial to children, and it's a pity you were not born, missie, when he was at Bradford. Let me see! Mr. Gainsborough went to live in London ten years ago. It was the year little Pris, my youngest grandchild, was two years old. Mollie was holding her in her arms, and Jack had a bundle of faggots in his arms, when suddenly my fine gentleman, who had been looking at the chapel on the bridge, came along.

“‘Stand where you are. Don't move,’ said he.

“Mollie was a bit scared, but she held little Pris fast, and Mr. Gainsborough whipped out a book and a pencil, and made a drawing.

“‘Where do you live?’ asks he, and Mollie told him, ‘Close to grandfather's cottage.’

“And who's grandfather?”

“She told him, for she had always a pretty manner and showed him the way to this house. Jack came slowly along, and little Pris, laughing. I was sitting at my desk, just as you found me, missie, t'other day, and the door was open. I turned my head as I heard footsteps and Pris's little voice, and there stood Mr. Gainsborough.

“By George!” he cried. “I swear I've not come to Bradford for nought. Two studies in half an hour!”

“Studies?” I asked, wondering. I could only think of a study like my father's little room, full of musty books, where I sat every morning to con my tasks and cast up figures on a slate. “Studies?” I repeated.

“Ay, missie, that's the word. That's what Mr. Gainsborough called us, me and the children. He was a merry gentleman, and when he came several times to paint his picture of me he was as gay and happy as a boy, and he was a man long past days of youth. I often think I'd like to see him again, but he has left these parts, and I did hear that he was sought after by all the grand folks in London more than he was in Bath. He has a knack, as you might see in the picture he did of me if it were here to show you, of making everyone he painted twice as handsome as they are. He made them look alive, just as if they were going to speak. And the dumb animals he painted, they looked as if they were going to move off.”

I don't think that this about Mr. Gainsborough was told me all at once. But it was just a delight to Mr. Orpin to have me as a listener, and I drank in all his anecdotes and stories with eager interest. Many a time

he would say, "It's a thousand pities Mr. Gainsborough cannot make a study of you, missie," and I would mount on a chair in my bedchamber, on my return home, and gaze at myself in the small square of looking-glass hanging on the wall above the bureau, and wonder if Mr. Gainsborough would think me pretty enough for a study.

Mr. Orpin's grandchildren had left Bradford, for their father had taken a market garden in Bristol, and Mollie was grown up, and Pris and Jack had lost their good looks, Mr. Orpin said. But he would add, "What's the odds? They won't lose their good looks in Mr. Gainsborough's picture. Mine he gave to the carrier who took Mr. Gainsborough's canvases from Bath to London free of charge. But a gentleman here bought the other picture for a good, big sum of money. Ah," said Mr. Orpin with a sigh, "Bob has not been as steady as he might be, and the children were left to run wild. Mollie was a dark-haired gipsy, and had wonderful fine eyes. Little Pris was as fair as a lily, and Mr. Gainsborough was never tired of painting her over and over again.

"Jack was like Mollie, a young rascal, but as handsome as his sister. I was proud of 'em, and did my best to have them taught and kept decent in clothes, but their mother was a poor creature, cross and lazy, so the children hadn't a fair chance.

"I got very friendly with Mr. Gainsborough, and he would ask me to stroll about with him. I have stood on the old bridge with him many a time, when the sun was making the river ripple with gold. He used to say,—

“Orpin, it's better than silver and gold to have an eye for all fair sights. I get more pleasure out of a primrose bank, or the face of a beautiful child, like your Pris, than scores of folks get out of fine jewels and grand clothes.’

“Many a time I've seen Mr. Gainsborough stand as if moonstruck, gazing at a clump of trees with the sunshine coming through the branches—gazing and gazing—and then, waking up as from a dream, he would whip his book out of his pocket and say,—

“‘Ah! Orpin, after all, we can't paint aught as lovely as that.’

“Yet many people would have seen nothing wonderful in the clump of trees with the sun shining on them, and many would have scarce noticed Mollie's beauty, but have seen her poor frock—not free from tatters her mother should have mended, but didn't. I learned from Mr. Gainsborough, missie, to look out for the pretty things about me, and not the ugly ones.”

“Maybe,” Mr. Orpin said one day, “here's the reason I was so taken up with you when you came in on your birthday to shelter from the rain.” Then the dear old man would add as a homily,—“Don't forget—‘handsome is that handsome does.’”

“One day when Mr. Gainsborough heard the children's mother quarrelling and scolding their father about a trifle, he said,—

“‘A good-tempered wife is a big blessing to any man. I've got that blessing, and when I am such a brute as to speak crossly to her, I am soon full of sorrow, and too shamefaced to go and tell her so. I write a note, and make my little dog Fox take it to her in his mouth, to

beg pardon, and she sees the joke, and sends back a pretty answer by her dear spaniel Tristram. After I had flown into a passion one day,' Mr. Gainsborough said, 'I cried like a baby when the answer came to say her own dear Fox was always loving, and it was all Tris' fault for worrying as she had done, and she wished to kiss and say no more about it.'"

Mr. Gainsborough's note was written, it seems, in the name of Fox, and the answer in the name of Tristram. Both dogs came to Bradford with him. Mr. Orpin said,—

"I did not like the spaniel. He rampaged all over the place, gnawed the back of one of my books left on a chair within his reach. I like a quiet cat about, but I don't hold with dogs being taken out of their proper place."

As I have said, all these talks with Mr. Orpin covered several years of my childhood from my seventh birthday till I was thirteen. Then a great change came into my life, and I began to note down what I thought and what I did in my diary. The poor old book, yellow with age, lies before me now, and the events of my life onwards are taken from it and some other volumes, which have not seen the light for many a long day.

CHAPTER II.

MY FIRST FRIENDSHIP.

1790. WHEN I was thirteen years old my father felt I wanted more companionship than that of good Tilly, and better education and instruction in such matters as were necessary for a young gentlewoman of these times than he could give me. The secluded life in the little humble Parsonage had, I daresay, made me very different in appearance and manners from the daughters of the professional gentlemen of Bradford.

My head was, I am sure, too full of what Mr. Orpin said of my pretty looks, and how Mr. Gainsborough would have made me one of his Bradford studies, if only he had had the chance. So it was, no doubt, well for me that I was sent as a weekly boarder to the seminary for young ladies in Bridge Street, over which the Misses Castle presided. I need not enter into many particulars of my school-days. I was not happy in the restrictions and discipline of my new life after the freedom of my home. I was made sport of by my companions as an old-fashioned little piece of goods. My father had made me read history intelligently, and I had not been taught on the question and answer system by which a mere smattering of knowledge was attained. I felt I knew more than girls older than myself, but if I dared to answer a question otherwise than in the prescribed form,

after the lesson was over I had to pay a penalty by having bits of paper pinned to my back, with some epithet implying that I was a conceited baggage, and pretended to be wiser and more learned than my neighbours. Many were the bitter tears which this course of teasing made me shed.

My thick shoes, my short frock of Bradford cloth, my Quaker-like poke bonnet, my plain kerchief, with no lace or frills to relieve it, were all made the subject of merriment.

I used to long and crave for Saturday, when, on her return from market, Tilly called for me. The rapture with which I ran out to meet her and walk home with her along the familiar road towards the Parsonage cannot be described. I think, yes, I almost think, the pleasure of those Saturdays and Sundays made up for the dreariness of the other five days of the week. Then the visit on the way to Mr. Orpin's, although it had to be short, as Tilly wanted to hasten back with our Sunday dinner, was a joy to me.

After the scoffs of my companions it was no doubt very pleasant to be told I looked like a June rose, and that my hair shone like guineas, and other compliments which the dear parish clerk of Bradford lavished on me.

In the second year of my school life I made my first friendship. A young lady came to Miss Castle's school from a house in the country, not far from what was called the Duke's House or Kingston House, which was, in my childish eyes, a palace beautiful.

Miss Beauchamp was the daughter of a gentleman who, from ill health, had to resign a commission in the army, and, unlike so many military men, preferred the

comparative retirement of a small estate on the crest of the hill overlooking the town of Bradford to the whirl and gaiety of Bath. Captain Beauchamp had an incurable spinal disease, and could only walk a few steps at a time, and my new friend Virginia was her father's darling. For a long time he had refused to allow her to go to any school far from home. Thus it came about that Virginia was sent as a parlour boarder to Miss Castle's school, and treated with distinction by the mistresses and the girls, who, of course, were all anxious to make friends with the new comer. It was, I think, a surprise that Virginia Beauchamp singled me out as her favourite. She was full of spirit and pranks, which would have brought down condign punishment on any of her schoolmates. She had a sweet voice, and sang like a bird, because she could not help it. And how she danced! A dancing-master came over from Bath once a week for a class arranged by Mrs. Beauchamp, who did her best to get her daughter accomplished, and who had failed to gain permission from her father for Virginia to go to a fashionable seminary at Bath. Captain Beauchamp was obdurate. He must see the child whenever he wished, and oftener than once a week if he chose. So it came to pass that Wednesday, as well as Saturday, was fixed for Virginia to go home for a visit.

It was my first introduction to anything like "society," when Virginia succeeded in taking me to Hillside for a Wednesday afternoon, soon after her arrival at the school.

Well do I remember what I considered extraordinary audacity when she insisted on taking me with her to the parlour, where, in accordance with her privileges as

parlour boarder, she had a right of entrance at any time.

I was very unwillingly dragged along the passage to the door of the Misses Castle's sanctum, at which Virginia gave a quick tap, and went in holding my hand. All Miss Castle's pupils had to make a curtsy on entering or leaving a room.

I can see the ladies now turning with astonishment to behold Virginia holding my hand, my unwilling hand, for I tried to back to the door.

"Miss Beauchamp!" the eldest Miss Castle said, the bow on her high mob-cap vibrating as she nodded her head. "I hope, Miss Beauchamp, you have no complaint to urge against little Marjorie."

Virginia broke into a merry laugh.

"What a queer notion! I want to take Marjorie home with me to-morrow afternoon."

"With Captain and Mrs. Beauchamp's permission?" the youngest Miss Castle said, who was her sister's obedient henchwoman.

Miss Castle waved her hand.

"I am competent, Betty, to make proper inquiries."

Poor little Miss Betty seldom put herself forward or dared to make a suggestion. She always wanted to be her sister's echo.

"You do Marjorie a great honour, I am sure, Miss Beauchamp. I presume you have your mamma's permission."

"Of course I have; besides, I do as I like at home. If I wished to take a dozen of the girls to Hillside, which I don't, my dear old dad wouldn't mind. He and I always like the same things and the same people, so

that is all right, ma'am. I forgot to say 'ma'am' till now."

Miss Castle bowed, accepting the apology, but saying,—

"Young ladies should endeavour to remember little matters of etiquette, and most that I have known always address their mothers and fathers with respect, and never without either 'ma'am' or 'sir,' as the case may be."

Virginia nodded.

"I daresay." Then with another curtsey and a little laugh, "I take it, ma'am, I may have Marjorie's company to-morrow. Speak, Marjorie," Virginia said, giving my arm a little pinch. "Speak—say you want to come with me."

"I should like it very much, if—"

"If what; don't be stupid."

"If Mrs. Beauchamp really desires me to do so."

As a matter of fact Virginia was acting on her own responsibility, and neither her father nor mother knew of her intention. But I had no time to say more, for Virginia made a graceful curtsey, which I tried in vain to imitate, and we left the presence chamber, where the Misses Castle were enjoying repose after the day's work was over, while two underpaid and uneducated student-governesses kept what order they could after school hours.

Virginia Beauchamp was so intimately connected with my life in the future, that I must dwell a little at length on this, my first, introduction to her home. Virginia was scarcely to be reckoned pretty, but she had about her an indescribable attraction—I think "charm" is the word which best expresses her. She was *piquante* and clever, but utterly unable to fix her attention long on any sub-

ject; I would add, or her affection for any time on the same person.

But I should wrong her if I made no exception to this want of steadfastness. For the sudden, almost childish, liking she took for me deepened as far as a nature like hers can deepen into an abiding love, which bore a great strain that was put upon it at a future time.

It was a May day of flowers and sunshine when I found myself in a chariot, driving up to Hillside with Virginia. I had never been in a carriage before, if I except a low cart drawn by a rough pony, which my father hired sometimes when he wanted to go to the outskirts of his straggling parish. I felt I had risen in life, and wished Tilly could see me—so often had she told me my mamma was the daughter of a “lady of title,” and that she always hoped I should find my proper place in the world at last as her daughter, who refused to marry anyone but my father, and gave up coaches and fine things rather than wed with a rich man she did not love.

Now that I was on my way to a big house, and especially when the door was opened by a manservant, with powdered hair, I began to recall all Tilly's hopes, and think I was going to realise them. Virginia jumped out of the carriage with a sudden spring, and I followed more demurely. Virginia danced across the hall to a door on the right-hand side, and I heard a voice say,—

“Is that my sweetheart?”

“Yes, dad, and your sweetheart's friend, Marjorie. Come along, Marjorie, and speak to my father!”

Captain Beauchamp was lying on a couch by the window, and held out his hand to me—a long, thin

hand, a large ring on his finger glistening in the light as he did so. Captain Beauchamp looked rather curiously at me.

"So, my giddy girl has brought you for a holiday. That is right! You shall have a feast of good things. I'll warrant you don't feed on Bath buns and cream at Miss Castle's."

"No, indeed! It's bread and scrape, and bread and milk, for breakfast; and suet pudding, and dumplings, and mutton, for dinner; and bread and cheese for supper. I am invited to dainties by Miss Castle, and sit next her at the top of the table, but I should be ashamed to eat what the other girls can't have. Ah! here is mamma!"

Mrs. Beauchamp was a tall and beautiful woman—still young, and with aristocratic bearing. There seemed but little freedom of intercourse between Virginia and her mother, to judge by the way they greeted each other. Mrs. Beauchamp stooped and kissed her daughter's forehead, and then, turning to me, asked,—

"Who is this young lady, Virginia?"

"It's my friend, Marjorie, the parson's daughter at Crowhurst."

"Indeed! I hope I see you well, Miss Marjorie—an unexpected pleasure."

A burning blush rose to my face. It was evident that Virginia had not asked permission to bring me to Hillside.

"You will like a ramble in the garden, I daresay, with your friend. Tea will be served at five o'clock. I have two friends from Bath spending a day or two with me. You can amuse yourselves, I do not doubt."

"They must amuse me first. See here, my pet," Mr.

Beauchamp said, "you must come to the arbour and tell me stories of school, and how often Miss Castle has said, 'Really, my dear Miss Beauchamp, I must ask you to be more attentive.' You can give the old lady to the life."

"Yes, and meek Miss Betty, who daren't say 'Boo' to a goose," and Virginia began forthwith to mimic the good ladies and imitate their voices and manners and little gestures to perfection, her father looking on with admiration, and saying, "A born actress! a born actress!"

"Pull the bell, Virgy, for the man to help me out into the garden."

"I'll help you, daddy," Virginia said. "Marjorie shall take one arm and I'll take the other."

"No, no, my dear, you are not strong enough. Ring for the man, and then play with your little friend, and afterwards you can find me in the arbour. I don't want to meet your mother's fine friends. They talk about dancing and card-parties and nonsense, and that is not what a sick man cares to hear."

Hillside seemed a paradise to me. Virginia took me to see her bedroom. The bed and window had pretty chintz curtains, and a green, moss-like carpet was on the floor. She had a bureau to herself, with brass handles that shone like gold, and a mirror which showed almost our whole figures as we stood before it. The walls were papered with a green and white chequer, and as I looked round I said,—

"How could you leave this pretty chamber to come to Miss Castle?"

"Oh! I don't mind. I don't care much where I sleep. All this is pretty enough, but I wanted to go to school."

"I didn't," I said, "and yet my home is very different from yours," and I thought of my own little bedchamber, with its stained walls and strip of faded carpet on the bare boards. Yet it was home.

"Well," Virginia said, "let us go into the garden. I wish the strawberries were ripe, or even the gooseberries. But you shall come very often. I am glad I have got you for a friend. You are just the very sort I wanted, only I am not quite sure whether you care for me."

"I care very much for you, and you make school ever so much nicer to me. The girls do not tease me so much now. I thought at first they hated me and scoffed at me and my clothes."

"The impudent creatures! But you know why they tried to make you miserable, don't you?"

"No. Perhaps because I am poor, and have no fine things. Do you mean that?"

"You are an innocent. They were jealous of you. You are twice as pretty and twice as clever as most of them are."

"I can't think how anyone can be jealous of me."

"Well, you'll learn how it is one day, if you don't now."

That first afternoon at Hillside passed quickly enough, and lives in my memory, not only for its flowers and the first sight I had ever had of a prettily-furnished gentleman's house, but because of our walk back to Miss Castle's attended by a servant, who was carrying a basket full of good things for Virginia to dispense among her schoolfellows. As we got into the town we saw a crowd of people and a young gentleman standing by his horse talking to two men, who had their hands on his shoulder.

"What are they doing to that gentleman?" Virginia said. "Let us go nearer and listen."

"It is two of the press-gang, Miss Virginia. Come away."

"I sha'n't come away." And Virginia, holding my hand, pushed on to the place where the gentleman stood.

The young gentleman's face was flushed, and he said angrily,—

"You have no right to stop me. Let go, I say!"

"No, no. We've our orders, and we are bound to carry 'em out."

"What orders?"

"To take all able-bodied gents like you to serve for king and country."

"I am a man of property! You know you can't take me!"

"I know we can, unless you'll give proof of the truth of what you say."

"The truth, you villain! Do you take me for a liar?"

"Liar or not," said the man, who was spokesman for the other, "you'll have to be locked up for the night. There's a handy place on the old bridge. Come along, and make no more ado."

"You'll have to spend the night over the water," one of the crowd said with a loud laugh.

"What does he mean? Where is he to go? I am so sorry for him."

The gentleman turned towards us two girls, and, taking off his beaver hat, turned up at the side, with a small tuft of feathers, he smiled on us both and said,—

"I thank you, young ladies, for your courtesy."

"Come, come, sir, you must leave your fine speeches for the present. Come to the inn in the Market Place; there's them there that will settle the matter."

The gentleman made no further resistance, and again taking off his hat to us, he walked away with a proud, determined step with the men who had seized him.

Virginia was determined to go to the inn in spite of all the servant's remonstrances.

"You'll be late at school, and it will be said to be my fault, Miss Virgy."

"Nonsense; be quiet. I mean to see what they are going to do to that handsome young gentleman. Did you ever see such a smile, Marjorie?"

"He is very handsome," I said, "but don't follow him; it's bold to do so."

"Bold! I don't care. I mean to hear what has happened."

Nothing would stop Virginia when once she had set her heart on anything. She ran on, and I was obliged to follow her, the servant in charge of us rating and scolding all the time.

As might be expected we attracted attention, and I heard a man say, "See those two fly-away girls; they are off to have a word with the handsome young gentleman."

In vain I begged Virginia to stop. She hurried on till we got to the inn, before which a crowd had collected.

"I shall stay here till I know what is to be done."

"But it has struck eight, Virginia. Oh! do come away."

I might as well have spoken to a post. Virginia held her ground, pushing through the crush of people to get near the door.

Presently a gentleman of Bradford came hastily to the inn.

"It's Mr. Pearse; it's Dolly Pearse's father," I said. "He will tell Miss Castle of our being here. He will think us so—so naughty. I don't want to stay. I will go to Miss Castle's."

"A nice thing for a friend to do, I declare. Go and welcome, but don't expect me to care about you any more."

I was crying now with fear and vexation, and the servant kept up her scolding and entreaties and threats, but all to no purpose. Virginia had mounted on the horse-block close to the door, pulling me along to stand by her. We heard the sound of voices in the inn parlour, for the casement was open, though a red curtain prevented anyone from looking in.

Presently we heard a voice in loud, decided tones answering another in pleading accents. "No, sir, we would take your word for ten thousand pounds, but not for this young man; go he must to the Round House—the little stone room on the side of the bridge. March," was the next word, and five soldiers surrounded the young gentleman, and marched off with him.

Again, as he passed out, he saw us, and again he smiled and bowed.

There were murmurs of sympathy in the crowd, and low grumblings about the press-gang, and the hard-

ship of forcing men to fight. "But if the French land we should look small if we hadn't enough men to fight, with so many of 'em out of the country," someone remarked.

The little stone chamber on the bridge at Bradford is one of the curiosities of the place. Familiar to me from my childhood, I always passed it with a sort of awe, since I had several times seen a drunken man hustled into it and locked up, to be taken out, so Tilly told me, to be put in the stocks at the end of the bridge, "and serve him right," had always been Tilly's final word. I could understand that it might be well to lock up wicked, disorderly men, but to treat that fine and well-conditioned young gentleman in this fashion was quite inexplicable.

"He'll have naught to lie on but a little straw," the servant said, "and naught to sit on but a stone all night."

How dreadful this seemed to us both I cannot say, and how did Mrs. Beauchamp's servant know all those particulars?

"I had an acquaintance," she said, in answer to our questions, "who had to be shut up for brawling in the street, and, after all, he was not to blame, the other man picked the quarrel."

We made our way at last to Miss Castle's. It was very late, but all offences were pardoned when Virginia was the culprit. A few words of stern reproof and an attempt to throw the blame on my shoulders were met very composedly by Virginia, who made one of her most graceful curtseys as she said,—

"Good-night, ma'am. Marjorie didn't want to watch

the gentleman taken off by those ruffians, the press-gang, but *I* did, and he is a gentleman worth looking at, and made us a pretty bow."

"Good-night, Miss Beauchamp," Miss Castle always laid stress on the first syllable of Virginia's name, and invariably pronounced it as in French to show her familiarity with that language. "Good-night, Miss Beauchamp. I shall feel it my duty to report your conduct to your respected father on the first opportunity."

We went to our beds too full of the adventure to sleep as usual as soon as our heads touched the pillow. We were both equally full of pity and admiration for the prisoner in the cold stone chamber on the bridge, and exchanged many expressions of sorrow, as we thought of him sitting all the weary hours on a hard stone.

"What will they do with him to-morrow?" I said. "Do you think they will put him in the stocks?"

"Not they. He is a gentleman of title, I expect, or anyhow a squire; they dare not ill-use him. I wish I could only see him again."

So did I; and for a long time I had a romantic remembrance of the gentleman whose smile on me, even when he was in a sore strait, remained with me as a possession. Indeed, I long cherished a girlish admiration for the handsome stranger, who had been so hardly used by the press-gang.

Dolly Pearse, whose father had come to attempt the gentleman's rescue, now became something of a heroine in our eyes. She was commanded to obtain all the information she could on Saturday, when she went home for the weekly holiday, and on Monday Virginia and I plied her with questions.

Hitherto Virginia had not favoured Dolly with much attention, but now she was flattered by the notice of Miss Beauchamp, who called her a dear child, and wanted to hear everything. We gathered that Mr. Pearse had got a chair for the prisoner to sit on instead of the stone; that he was guarded by twelve soldiers, with whom he could talk to pass the night; that in the morning he was allowed to go to Mr. Pearse's house, under the care of one soldier; and that, when he was taken before the Commissioners, and they found he was a gentleman with an estate near Melksham, in the County of Wiltshire, they let him go, on a fifty-pound bond for his appearance, when he promised to bring the title-deeds of the estate in three weeks' time, and then he would be a free man.

All this information, and much that I have taken from my diary of that time, was not in the precise words written here, but in all cases I give as nearly as possible the true account of the events of my life—small or great.

There are many who will be ready to say this taking of Mr. Roland Willoughby, for such was the name of our hero of romance, was not of any vast importance. But as the story of my life unrolls those who have the will, and, it may be, I should add, the patience, to follow me through the changes and chances of many years, will discover that the appearance of Mr. Roland Willoughby had its significance, and that it is not to be wondered at that the June day when the press-gang seized him was a memorable one for me and for Virginia also.

The French War was at this time impoverishing

Great Britain, and recruits for the army were sought for in all the country districts. Many a poor man, who could not plead, as Mr. Willoughby could, that he was owner of an estate, and was following the business of farming his own lands, was torn away from home and kindred, and forced to take up the musket and endure hardships for which he was unfitted by previous training.

Sons were taken from mothers, husbands from wives, and dragged off by the press-gang, resistance being useless. This system has now, in the reign of our young Queen, passed away and is remembered only as a custom of a barbarous age.

For the next year my life went on in the same groove. I spent many a day at Hillside, and I was starting off on a bright June morning in the midsummer holidays, when I heard my father's voice calling me.

"I am in a hurry," I said. "The chariot from Hillside is coming to the Bridge to meet me at ten o'clock."

"My little girl does not spend much time with her old father nowadays."

There was a tone of sad reproach in the voice, and I was arrested by it. Something like a throb of pain and a dread of coming ill made me turn into the little study and say,—

"Do you want me, father? If you do I'll stay at home."

"No, no; but let us have a quiet talk to-night. I have much I would fain say to you, while I can."

"While I *can*!" What did he mean? Was he ill, and I never to take note of it?

"Come home early, Marjorie. Don't be late." Then,

to my surprise—for my father was not a man to make many professions of affection, or signs of it—after looking earnestly at me for a few moments, he put his arms round me, drew me close to his breast and kissed me. “You are like your mother, Marjorie. So like, I could fancy it was she gathering the roses in the garden when I was watching you from the window. They look very pretty,” he said, touching two blooms of York and Lancaster I had pinned to my kerchief. “You are a white and red rose yourself. Now go. Don’t keep the fine folks’ chariot waiting. It is well you have found good friends.”

My father turned to his desk again, and I saw he leaned his head on his hand.

Tilly was waiting with her basket to hold her marketings by the gate.

“Tilly, is my father ill?” I asked.

“Anyone with half an eye can see as much,” was the reply. “He is failing, breaking up, and that is the truth.”

“Oh! Tilly, you don’t mean he is going to die. I won’t go to Hillside. I’ll stay with him.”

Then Tilly changed her tone. “Dying—who said his reverence was dying? Not I, so don’t run off with a wrong notion. He is getting old before his time, that’s all.”

Old! and I felt so young and happy. Age and death seemed so far off, so impossible for me. But something of the glory of the midsummer day was dimmed, and my spirits were not as high as usual when I took my place by Virginia’s side in the yellow chariot.

Mrs. Beauchamp was always civil to me, but never

warm in her welcome, when I arrived for my frequent visits. On this occasion she was less cordial than usual. She addressed me suddenly at dinner with—

I suppose Virginia has told you, Marjorie, that now she has finished her education, she is going on a visit to Lady Mervyn's for a greater part of the month of July."

"No, ma'am," I said, and I looked at Virginia, who said in her careless fashion,—

"I've not told Marjorie, because I am not going to Lady Mervyn's. Daddy says I may please myself. I hate Lady Mervyn."

Mrs. Beauchamp smiled incredulously. "The arrangement is made for you. The chariot will take you to Bromley Park on Monday. My woman is preparing some new frocks for you, and you must be fitted this afternoon."

Virginia never pouted, or seemed to lose her temper. I think I would rather have seen her look angry, or even speak angrily, than see her mouth set in determined lines, and hear her hum a tune without taking further notice of what her mother said.

"Did you learn those manners at Miss Castle's, Virginia? It is considered ill-bred to hum in the presence of your elders and superiors."

"I am only in the presence of one elder, mamma. Marjorie is younger than I am. As to my superiors, daddy isn't here, and so—"

Mrs. Beauchamp's brow grew dark, and she administered a sharp reproof, which I felt was deserved.

"I shall thank you, Virginia, to behave as a young gentlewoman is expected to behave, or leave the room at once."

The dessert was on the table, which reflected the silver dishes, and the piles of fruit they held, on its shiny surface.

"I shall take my dessert before I go, so will Marjorie."

I felt very hot and uneasy while this scene was going on. How often, when I felt lonely in our little Parsonage, I had longed for my mother, my fair, young mother, who had died when I was too small to remember her, scarcely a year old.

But it continually surprised me to see how little respect Virginia showed her mother, and how she never seemed to care to be with her. Captain Beauchamp doted on her. She was the bright spot in his invalid life, and he spoiled her with over-indulgence. Virginia took all her father's devotion as a matter of course, and her mother's cold manner made her doubtless turn to her father in any difficulty, certain that he would take her part.

It was so on this summer day of which I am writing.

Virginia took me with her to her father's room, the library he seldom left for more than a few turns in the garden, and the variety of lying on cushions in the summer-house for an hour.

Captain Beauchamp was, I thought, more than usually languid on this occasion, and I wondered that Virginia began at once to air her grievance about this visit to Lady Mervyn.

"Daddy, say you can't spare me. I hate the idea. What will you do without me? Do say I am to stay at home."

"My dear child, your mother must decide. Bromley

Park is a fine place, and there are some nice young ladies there."

"Nice! Oh, father, I want no young ladies! I have got Marjorie. She is to come and stay here for a visit, so I can't go to Bromley Park."

I had a weight on my heart as to my father wanting me. From what he had said, still more from what Tilly had said, I had a secret uneasiness about him. "I can't leave my father, Virginia, so you can go to pay this visit, and not think of me," I said.

"How contrary everyone is; even my dearest daddy is not half as kind as usual to his poor pet, Virgy." And she knelt down by her father's sofa and kissed and fondled his hand, saying,—“He won't send his Virgy away."

"We won't talk any more about it, sweetheart. Let me have a scene from the 'Merchant of Venice,' that will make me forget that my poor, broken back aches rather badly."

Virginia was instantly alert and full of sympathy. I had learned the Trial Scene with her, and we had recited it at Miss Castle's last breaking-up party. Rather, *I* recited it, but Virginia acted her part. She had the gift in those days, the not too common gift of losing all consciousness of herself in the character she personated. She had held Miss Castle spellbound as she became no longer Virginia Beauchamp but Portia. But she would change her part with me as the fancy took her, and her father was enraptured with Shylock.

My Portia was but a tame performance, and I served as a foil to set off the histrionic gift of Virginia.

Mrs. Beauchamp took an evening drive soon after tea, and I was set down by Mr. Orpin's cottage, where Tilly was to meet me.

Virginia whispered as she bade me good-bye,—

"You must come to Hillside. I will write." Then she gave me an emphatic hug, which called forth,—

"Gently, Virginia!" from Mrs. Beauchamp, and then I was dismissed with—"Good-evening, Miss Mostyn, I wish you a pleasant vacation."

So Virginia and I parted, and did not meet again till the circumstances of both were changed.

My good friend, Mr. Orpin, was standing at the door when the carriage drove up. He looked very grave, and I did not have his usual smile of welcome.

"Where is Tilly?" I asked. "I thought I might keep her waiting."

"She isn't here," Mr. Orpin said.

"Then I will come in, and we will have a nice talk."

Still I saw there was something strange in Mr. Orpin's manner. He did not come into the house, but stood on the doorstep, looking towards the town.

"Are you looking for Tilly?" I asked.

"No, I'm looking for Crabbe's grandson. He is gone on an errand to the town."

"I don't want to walk with him, he is such a big, stupid boy."

"Yes, a blockhead and a dunce. Talent don't lie in the Crabbe family, does it? I always say—" but here Mr. Orpin broke off. "Here he is! here he is! and the doctor's gig. That's well! that's well! for, my dear missie, his reverence, your papa, has taken rather

poorly, and Tilly couldn't leave him, and so sent for the doctor."

I saw it all now, and cried,—

"My father is dead, and you will not tell me—Oh! it is cruel, cruel!"

B O O K II.

EARLY WOMANHOOD.

1670-8

1671-2

CHAPTER III.

A GREAT CHANGE.

I CLIMBED up to a seat by the doctor, who pulled up when he saw me. The question I longed to ask died on my lips, I could not ask it. The doctor perhaps saw my pale face and trembling lips, for he said,—

“The parson has had a stroke, they tell me; we will see what is to be done.”

Then if there was something to be done, he was not dead! I remember how I clutched the rail of the high gig, and struggled not to cry out for the pain at my heart. At last I managed to say,—

“My father isn’t dead?”

“No, not that I know of. The boy who brought the summons only said his master had had a fit.”

We drove on after this in silence, and when we turned into the lane, and were in sight of the Parsonage gate, I saw Tilly standing there, the frills of her cap fluttering in the breeze, and her hand held to her brow to shade her eyes from the vivid rays of a brilliant western sun. The doctor leaped out, and I saw Tilly shake her head. Had they forgotten me? Why did not Tilly speak to me? Crabbe’s boy, who had ridden on the back seat, was at the horse’s head; and, trem-

bling and fearing, yet longing to get into the house, I got down the high step and fell against the gate.

"Are you hurt, miss?" the boy said.

I didn't know and I didn't care, but went up to the door. There Tilly met me.

"Bless your dear little heart!" she said. "It's a sad home-coming for you."

Then she took me to her faithful breast and kissed me as in my baby days.

"He's alive, my dearie, and you'll see him. His heart has been failing a long time. It was broke when your mamma died, and it's never been the same since."

The doctor came out of the study and called Tilly. She put me on the old settle by the empty parlour grate, where I had filled a pitcher with sweet-William and roses that morning. I never see those flowers to this day but I recall my lonely watch in that little parlour of the Parsonage. There was no sound but the occasional pawing of the doctor's patient horse at the gate, and the flutter of the branches of a climbing rose against the half-open casement. I sat with tightly-clasped hands, waiting—waiting—and dreading, yet longing for a summons. At last I heard the doctor's voice.

"How old is she?" and Tilly's answer in broken accents,—

"Going in sixteen."

"Poor child! Are there any relations?"

"Only distant—of the dear mistress's."

"Well, they ought to be written to."

"I don't know where they be, sir. Oh dear! oh dear!"

I had felt as if I was turned to stone, as if I could not move; but now I started up and fled to the parlour door. It was half open, and I pushed through it, saying,—

“I am going to my father. Why do you stop me? Let me go!”

Tilly tried to prevent me, but I struggled past her and the doctor and went to the study. My father lay on the floor, with a pillow under his head. So peaceful did he look, and so quiet, that I was sure he could not be dead. I knelt down by him and kissed him gently, really thinking him asleep. I did not call him or utter a word. The doctor and Tilly stood behind me. The doctor said presently,—

“The parson, your good father, has had a peaceful departure. You may thank God for it, my dear. It is very different sometimes, as I see and know often enough. Come, my dear, let your good maid put you to bed—come.”

He put his arms round me to raise me from the floor, and as he did so the petals of the roses I had worn all day were scattered over the prostrate form before me. I remember nothing more. Tilly told me the doctor carried me upstairs, and that I was in a deep swoon, from which they found it hard to wake me.

The next two or three weeks passed like a dream. My father had led such a retired life that he was little known in the neighbourhood.

Mr. Pearse, my schoolmate Dolly's father, was a lawyer, and had made my father's will, and there were two or three gentlemen who used to come to talk over things that were passing in the world, and consult him

on matters of scholarship, for he was known to be a devoted student of the classics.

A letter was found, to be opened at his death, addressed to me. I have it now, and it lies before me, yellow and tattered with age, as I write the story of this earlier part of my life.

My father gave me instructions to write to my mother's cousins and ask them to befriend me. They lived at Windsor, and he evidently thought they would be touched by my lonely condition. But it did not seem that they wished to notice me, for no reply came to my letter.

Tilly was not surprised, for she said the grand folks took no heed of my mother after her marriage, and she never tried to make them do so. "She used to say she didn't want anyone but your father. They were like lovers to the last. When you were born your mamma said to me,—'Tilly, I am too happy; it won't last; it can't last.'"

"I used to tell her it was wicked to say so, but she was right. She was never herself again after you were born—could scarce hold you in her arms, and just faded away. Your papa was a changed man after she died. He shut himself up here with you and me, and I used to say he had no resignation. I dared sometimes to tell him the people liked to see him about, and that the gentry gave up coming because he wouldn't see them, and when you grew up it would be a thousand pities if you had no friends.

"He only shook his head, and would say,—'You mean well, Tilly, but the light of my eyes is gone from me, and my soul refuses comfort.' Then, when he began

to teach you your tasks, he got brighter, and at last sent you to Miss Castle's school."

A young gentleman came to the Parsonage. He bought our poor bits of furniture, and he kept on Tilly and Jack Crabbe in the garden—that was a comfort to me.

Mr. Whitehead was what was called a Methodist, and the parish was, as Tilly told me, "woke up with preaching and praying."

It was at first, I believe, somewhat of a trial to Tilly, but in the end she held herself to be converted, and was devoted to her new master almost as much as she had been to the old.

As for me, I had a small competence left me from my dear father's savings, and Mr. Pearse arranged for me to return to Miss Castle as a boarder.

Mrs. Beauchamp made no overture of friendliness. Virginia had gone to Lady Mervyn's. I had a long letter from her, crossed in her fine pointed hand, full of professions of affection, and saying as soon as she returned she should insist on my taking up my abode at Hillside.

I knew well enough there would be opposition to this, and I determined to make the best of my position at Miss Castle's.

With my father's death, and my departure from the little Parsonage, my childhood and early youth closed.

As I look back to this turning-point in the journey of life, I feel a strange pity for the girl of scarce sixteen, innocent and ignorant of the ways of society, who had no loving hand to guide her through the tangles and briars of this workaday world.

I was, nay I am yet, of a romantic turn of mind. It may be that romance came very near to sentimentality with me, for the image of the gentleman who had smiled on Virginia and me on that memorable evening remained with me. He became an ideal which I cherished; but never after the fashion of these days did I make my devotion to this shadowy ideal common property.

Virginia had many a time declared that she craved to see Mr. Roland Willoughby, and she should have no rest till she did see him again. She was sure that his smiles and graceful bows were meant for her, not for me, and she talked a good deal of nonsense about him.

Her father's words were true in more senses than one, for "Virginia Beauchamp was a born actress!"

CHAPTER IV.

RECOGNITION.

1794. I WAS practising on the old harpsichord one morning early in August in Miss Castle's parlour when I heard the sound of carriage-wheels stopping at the door.

Miss Betty, who was mending stockings by a table, started up, and, going to the window, said,—

“Marjorie, stop, it's Madam Beauchamp; Dear me! sister is out, and I feel so flustered. What can she want?”

Poor Miss Betty went to the small, unbecoming mirror over the mantelshelf, and tried to adjust her cap, which was a curious erection, crowned with a faded yellow bow of ribbon.

“What can she want?” she repeated helplessly. “Miss Virginia is sure not to return.”

All conjecture was stopped by the maid, in her working gown, with bare arms and a large apron, opening the door, and saying in a scared voice,—

“Here's a lady to see Miss Mostyn.”

Mrs. Beauchamp swept into the room, looking very stately and handsome.

Miss Betty's low curtsey and stammered apology that her sister was not at home were hardly noticed.

Mrs. Beauchamp came up to me and said,—

“My daughter Virginia has met with an accident; it

is impossible for her to return at present. Lady Mervyn is excessively kind, and is so good as to invite you, Miss Mostyn, to go to Bromley Park to bear Virginia company."

"I am very sorry, ma'am, to hear of Virginia's accident. Pray, what caused it?"

"She attempted to ride a spirited horse, in spite of all that was said to prevent it. She is sadly self-willed, and has brought this illness on herself, and great inconvenience to her friends."

"Dear, dear!" Miss Betty exclaimed, "I hope it's not serious or dangerous?"

"It will be a long business, I am afraid," Mrs. Beauchamp said. "I was summoned to Bromley Park, and I have left Perkyns, my daughter's waiting-woman, to attend to her. She is pining for you, Miss Mostyn. I hope Miss Castle will allow you to go to console your friend."

"Oh, of course, ma'am, of course! Miss Mostyn is now a resident here since her poor papa's death."

"Ah! Miss Mostyn, I have not seen you since your sad bereavement to offer my condolence. I hope I am not wrong in thinking you will not refuse to go to my poor wilful girl. Bromley Park is a fine place, and may be a little overwhelming to you at first, but you will soon grow accustomed to it, and her ladyship is very affable."

As Mrs. Beauchamp spoke, I saw she was surveying my heavy mourning frock, with its tucks of crape, with some anxiety. Since I had been supposed to be grown-up at sixteen, I had to wear a cap, which, with nothing to relieve it, was not an ornamental headgear, with a

bow like a crow perched on the crown. Miss Castle had willed that it was the right thing to do, and I had only made a feeble resistance.

I disliked Mrs. Beauchamp's tone of patronage, and when she went on to say that "she was sure that Virginia's waiting-woman would dress my hair and arrange my kerchief in a becoming fashion," I could scarcely restrain my indignation. I made a curtsy and said,—

"If I go to Bromley Park, ma'am, it will be to keep Virginia company, and I shall not care, so soon after my late trouble, to make any change in my dress."

"Quite so. I understand perfectly, but mourning admits of some following of the mode. However, to come to the point, will you be ready to-morrow by eleven o'clock, when the chariot will be at the door? With"—and she bowed to Miss Betty—"Miss Castle's permission, you shall be driven to Lady Mervyn's house."

"Was Miss Virginia much hurt by the fall from the horse, ma'am?" Miss Betty asked.

"She fractured her leg, and has a sprained back, which, owing to hereditary delicacy, naturally makes us anxious. By-the-bye, Miss Mostyn, Mr. Beauchamp would like to see you. Will you return with me now? or will your preparations for to-morrow render it inconvenient? What does Miss Castle say?"

"I am sure my sister would wish Marjorie to do as you wish, madam."

Poor Miss Betty never gave an independent opinion.

"I am sure," she repeated, "it will be an honour for Marjorie to visit Bromley Park."

The discussion ended in my going to put on my mourning cloak and hood, and driving up to Hillside

with Mrs. Beauchamp. I had not been there since that midsummer day when my father died. Tears unbidden sprang to my eyes as I recalled his parting that day, and how many had been my misgivings as to whether I should leave him or stay at home.

How I wished I had not left him; how I reproached myself for a thousand little ways in which I had neglected him which were continually rising up to condemn me. And he had loved me so well, my dear father. Why had I not been more to him, more like my dead mother, whose image, he said, I was? Vain, vain are our regrets, our self-reproaches, when the veil between us and those who have loved us, and whom we have loved more than we thought while we had them, has fallen, that impenetrable veil, that eternal silence, that impossibility of ever saying, "I am sorry for any fault of temper or neglect or indifference; I am sorry, forgive me."

Mrs. Beauchamp only made a few casual remarks as we drove along, and they needed no response.

Mr. Beauchamp's man was waiting in the hall when we arrived.

"Mr. Beauchamp will like to see Miss Mostyn before dinner is served."

"Very well. Take Miss Mostyn to the library."

I was greatly touched by the reception Mr. Beauchamp gave me.

"It is good of you to come, my dear," he said. "Have you consented to go to Bromley Park to see my poor, darling child?"

"Yes, sir. I am to go there to-morrow."

"Then write to me what is the precise state of the

case. I am tied here a helpless cripple, and I want, I crave, to get trustworthy tidings of her condition. Will you let me have these tidings from you? Her mother is so reticent, probably from a kind motive, but I would sooner hear the truth. If my child is to be a cripple, like me, I shall only wish to die that I may never see it."

"I hope, sir, Virginia will recover. Broken limbs can be mended."

"Better than broken hearts, eh?" was the quick rejoinder. "But it is the hurt to her back which haunts me. I pray you, my dear, to get at the truth, whatever it may be. Ignorance is no bliss to me in this instance. I have missed your visits here," Mr. Beauchamp went on to say, "and I have been very sorry for the cause, very sorry indeed. Your good father is well spoken of as a scholar and a gentleman, and it is a thousand pities he buried himself in that little Parsonage, for your sake, my dear, as well as his own."

The bell sounded for dinner, and Mrs. Beauchamp came in to tell me I could lay aside my hood and cloak in the ante-room.

She hastened my departure after dinner, saying she was sure I should want time to make my preparations for my visit.

"I shall not drive to Bromley Park with you," Mrs. Beauchamp said. "The excitement of seeing you will be enough for one day, but I shall not delay a visit to my poor, wayward girl longer than next week." Mrs. Beauchamp sighed as she added, "Virginia does not seem desirous of my company. I attribute many of her faults to her father's indulgence, which has made her

impatient of control. Virginia's affection for you makes me suggest that you should, my dear Miss Mostyn, dispossess her mind of an absurd notion that she would make her fortune on the stage. It is almost providential that this accident puts a stop to it, for the present at anyrate, and may show her the folly of entertaining such an idea. The stage for my daughter, and association with the crowd of the green-room, is quite impossible."

I could only be silent as I listened to Mrs. Beauchamp's complaints of her only child, and apparent indifference to her present condition. Young as I was I felt that these complaints from a mother of a daughter were very ill-judged, especially when addressed to a girl of sixteen, who was her friend.

I can fancy I see myself now, in my heavy mourning garments, stepping out of Mrs. Beauchamp's chariot and entering the hall of the stately old Jacobean mansion standing in the broad acres of Bromley Park.

I was dumb with astonishment and shyness as I followed a footman to the door of a boudoir on the first flight of stairs, and he asked me, with a toss of his powdered head,—

"What name, madam?"

All my dignity and composure seemed to fail me, and I replied in a tremulous voice,—

"Marjorie Mostyn."

I am sure the man heard what I said, and that he knew I was expected, but he bent down from his powdered height and said,—

"I beg pardon, miss—what name?"

The supercilious rudeness of the man's manner did much to restore my composure, and I said firmly,—

“Mistress Marjorie Mostyn.”

There was an impertinent twinkle in the man's eye, and he threw open the door and shouted my name.

A lady was sitting at a tapestry-frame, and a child was playing with some toys at her feet. The lady rose at once, and coming towards me, said,—

“Miss Mostyn, you are very welcome. The poor invalid is wearying to see you. Let me unfasten your cloak.”

The voice was so sweet and low, and the lady's manner so gentle and almost tender, as she arranged my kerchief and smoothed back my hair, which the heavy hood had ruffled, that, although I would have given all I had to prevent it, I began to cry.

“Come and sit by me on the couch and rest a little,” she said, stooping to take the child in her arms, who plucked at her mother's gown for notice. “Bébé must be quiet,” she said, as the child began to talk in broken accents of the tower she was building with wooden blocks, and which she wanted her mother to finish. “Not now, Bébé.” And, touching the bell, a nurse appeared to take the child away.

She went obediently as she was bid, her mother giving her a fond kiss before she trotted off.

“There! now we can talk,” she said. “Little Bébé is so much with me—my dear little companion in this large house. You will like to hear of poor Virginia Beauchamp. She has had a bad fall from one of Sir Melville's cobs. She was warned not to mount it, but she assured us she had a firm seat. As it turned out,

we soon saw she was quite unfitted to manage a horse far less spirited than Cosmo, and when he curveted and reared she was thrown heavily to the ground by the entrance gate. Sir Melville's nephew, who had accompanied her, raised her and carried her back to the house. He owns a small property adjoining the Park, and is very often with us. His mother was Sir Melville's sister, and he has inherited the property from her. He is still very young, and that little portrait of him hanging between the windows was painted by Gainsborough in London."

I had been too much bewildered with my position, and touched by Lady Mervyn's kindness, to notice the picture before. Now I saw it, and knew that it represented the gentleman whom we had seen taken by the press-gang two years before.

I seemed to get a clue to Virginia's rhapsodies in her letter of the delights of Bromley Park, and her telling me she had a secret to confide to me concerning the person she called the hero of the press-gang. Having thus whetted my curiosity, she had said no more, and then her accident had stopped all communication till Mrs. Beauchamp had come with the news to Miss Castle's house the day before my arrival at Bromley Park.

Yes, it was Mr. Roland Willoughby who was smiling down at me from his place on the wall of Lady Mervyn's boudoir. Mr. Gainsborough, who had the gift of catching the best expression of his subject, had succeeded here most wonderfully. It was not only the lips that smiled, but the whole face was illumined. Faultless as the features were, and smart as was the dress, from the lace cravat, tied in a large bow under the chin, to

the white satin revers of the waistcoat, which were turned out on the mouse-brown coat, there was no suspicion of effeminacy in the face. The soft, abundant hair was curled and turned back from a forehead which was curved like a laurel leaf, and beneath it eyes of extraordinary brilliancy looked out from under pencilled eyebrows.

Lady Mervyn saw how earnestly I gazed on the portrait, and she said,—

“I think, though the picture is small, it is one of Mr. Gainsborough’s best portraits, and, I may safely say, when you see the original you will not consider it flattered. Roland is as good as he is handsome.”

“I have seen him, madam,” I said in a low voice.

“Ah! was it when poor Virginia saw him, that evening when he was seized by the press-gang? Virginia reminded Roland of it, and he said he could laugh now about what, at the time, was a very unpleasant incident. But to return to Virginia. You will find her in a very unhappy frame of mind, and it is difficult to offer her any consolation. Doubtless all trials are hardest to bear when we bring them upon ourselves, as this poor girl brought hers. You are a great friend, she tells me.”

“Yes, madam,” I said, hesitating a little. “Virginia and I were schoolfellows at Miss Castle’s school. She is very clever, and can recite from Shakespeare’s plays, and dance beautifully.”

“Poor child!” Lady Mervyn said, “it will be long ere she dances again. I am a little distressed to notice how little sympathy exists between her and her mother. It would break my heart, I think, if, when she grows up,

my Bébé did not give me her confidence as well as her love. Now, Miss Mostyn—”

“Oh, madam!” I said, “please call me Marjorie.”

“It is a sweet name, and I will gladly do so, my dear. I hear you are lonely and have no relations, so you must take me as a friend, and I trust your visit here will be as pleasant as the sad circumstances of your friend’s state will permit.”

I have seen many lovely women since the day when I first had the happiness of seeing Lady Mervyn, but I do not think another so fair, and any representation of her expressive features, even by the hand of the great painter, Mr. Romney, falls short of the reality. Mrs. Beauchamp was handsome and tall and stately. She, too, had the fine features and the clear complexion of a brunette. What was it she lacked? What made Lady Mervyn a joy to look upon, while Mrs. Beauchamp’s face possessed no attraction, and a momentary contemplation of it was enough? I think it was that the pure and loving spirit of Lady Mervyn, shining even through a plain face, would have made it good to look upon, but, added as it was to remarkable charm of feature and grace of form, Lady Mervyn’s exterior was bound to win all hearts.

Just as we were leaving the room, Lady Mervyn saying she would show me herself to the chamber where Virginia lay, Mr. Willoughby came in. He bent over Lady Mervyn’s hand with graceful courtesy, and, according to the fashion of the day, took it in his and kissed it. For, in high circles (as I suppose I must needs call them), following the example set at Windsor by the Queen, sons and daughters and more distant re-

latives treated their elders with the studious politeness which they would show to strangers. Thus Mr. Willoughby could not have been more scrupulously polite if he had greeted a princess of the blood instead of his uncle's wife.

I stood by, I need not say, wondering whether he would honour me with recognition. Was it likely that he should remember me after that transient meeting? But my heart beat fast with a throb of delight when Mr. Willoughby, after inquiring for Miss Beauchamp, turned to me and said,—

“Ah! here is, yes, surely it is, the young lady who was with Miss Beauchamp, and honoured me with her sympathy, when I was hustled off to my prison for the night. Present me, Aunt Anastasia.”

“Gladly, Roland. This is Miss Marjorie Mostyn, who is so kind as to come here to try to lighten the long hours of poor Virginia's captivity by her presence.”

“I am sure she will do that. Miss Beauchamp is to be congratulated in having such a companion. How does she do to-day?”

“She has had a restless night, and suffers much pain in the broken limb. We are going to her now. You will dine with us, Roland? You will find Edgar in the billiard-room and your uncle's agent, Mr. Sparfford.”

Mr. Willoughby held the door to let us pass, and, as he bowed to me, the same smile which I had cherished as a remembrance in all these two years beamed on me.

“*Au revoir*, Mistress Marjorie,” he said; “you are not leaving soon, I hope?”

“Oh, no!” Lady Mervyn said. “Marjorie is come to pay us a long visit; at least, so I hope.”

I followed my hostess up a wide, marble staircase, and when we reached the corridor at the top Lady Mervyn said,—

“It is a good view of the hall from this point, and of the curious ceiling, which represents the sun, moon and stars—a quaint device, with all the little angels flying about amongst them. I always think the wings of several of them are too dangerously near the sun, and might catch fire. This house was built in the time of James the First, when all quaint devices were in vogue in houses and dress, for His Majesty dearly loved finery and ornaments of all kinds.”

“It is all very grand,” I said. “Mrs. Beauchamp told me I should be overcome with it; but you are so kind to me I don’t feel as frightened as I expected.”

“That is well,” Lady Mervyn said. “I should be very sorry if anyone was afraid of me.”

“No one could be,” I ventured to say.

“Now,” Lady Mervyn said, turning off the large landing, where we had been standing by the carved rails, “this is the way to Virginia’s room. I have ordered one next it to be prepared for you, and one of my maids will attend to you. Perkyns, Virginia’s woman, has as much, or more, than she can do to wait on the poor invalid.”

As we drew near the room where Virginia lay I heard her voice raised in querulous tones.

“Why doesn’t she come? I thought you said she was coming this morning? Oh, dear, I am so miserable!”

“Here is your friend, my dear,” Lady Mervyn said.

When Virginia saw me she burst into convulsive weeping, but she held out her arms to me.

"Isn't it dreadful, Marjorie? And I was so happy, and I shall never be happy again."

I sat down by Virginia's bed and tried to soothe her.

"It's no use talking when she is like this, Miss Marjorie. She must have her cry out," Perkyns said. "But I am glad you are come, for I am almost tired of it. She just puts herself into a fever, and—"

"Hold your tongue, Perkyns; you are an impertinent creature. I wish you had broken your leg instead of me—your back too."

"If wishes were horses beggars might ride, but as they ain't I am not likely to mount a prancing steed and pretend I can ride when I can't."

Lady Mervyn had gently left the room, and after a sniff at a big smelling-bottle Perkyns held under her nose, Virginia grew quieter.

I did my best to divert poor Virginia from brooding over her troubles, which were indeed great, for she loved a life of variety, and her dancing, as well as her acting, was thought very fine indeed. It was her chief pleasure to lie with her hand in mine and tell me of Mr. Willoughby's admiration for her.

"It is so plain that he cares for me, and I expect if only I had not gone for that ride and been shut up like this he would have made me a proper offer. He sent me these flowers, with a sweet message. They are faded now, but I won't let Perkyns throw them away. A hard, cross thing she is. I shall make mother change her, and let me have Cordelia, the young girl at Hillside,

who helps mother's maid to get up her lace and do odd jobs. Tell me, how are you getting on here?"

This question was asked on the third day after my arrival, and I hastened to say I thought Lady Mervyn the most beautiful woman in the world.

Virginia laughed. "Your world is small, my dear. She is not up to the proper mode. Her hair is not dressed right, and her gowns are made too high at the neck. I like her well enough, and at one time I hated her, because she lectured me one day for speaking without due respect to my mother. Tell me what you think of that stepson of Lady Mervyn's. He is sly, and a Paul Pry also. I know Willoughby detests him."

So Virginia had already come to call Mr. Willoughby in the familiar way which fashionable young ladies adopted with their gentlemen acquaintances.

"I have not thought much of Mr. Mervyn," I said.

"Then you had best think a great deal of him. He is heir to this fine house and the title. You may be my lady for all you know. I sha'n't stand in your way."

Something in me revolted from this and a great deal more idle gossip, which seemed poor Virginia's only diversion. I read to her her favourite plays, and was surprised at her astounding memory. She would take up a part, and before I could read it give it with all her accustomed fire or sentiment. At times the pain in her back made her tearful and very fretful. This was always worse after a visit from Mrs. Beauchamp. Mother and daughter had little in common when both were in strong health, and far less now one was prostrate and ailing.

Mrs. Beauchamp, I must allow, was not a tender nurse. She was never composed when with Virginia, looked continually at her watch, fidgeted with her chains and ornaments, and instead of listening to poor Virginia's complaints, or amusing her with any little details of home and telling her of her father, she was often contemplating herself in the mirror and arranging the curls which clustered round her smart little hat, which was perched on them more for ornament surely than for use.

One day, a golden September day, a week after my arrival, Lady Mervyn came into Virginia's room and said,—

“Mrs. Beauchamp will be here before long. Take a run in the park, Marjorie, and I will await her arrival, and stay with Virginia till she comes. Go to the nursery, my dear Marjorie. I think Béb  will be just starting for her morning airing, if you like to accompany her.”

I went to put on my hood, which was more properly speaking a bonnet, tied with very wide, black ribbon, and then, dispensing with anything else, I ran gladly to the nursery. It was empty, and evidently B    had started for her walk. I was not displeased. The joy of breathing the pure, crisp air in the brilliant sunshine, which made bands of gold across the green alleys of the park, was enough for me. I was glad to be alone, for I confessed to myself that day after day with Virginia was more irksome than practising on the old harpsichord and sitting with the two Misses Castle in their dull parlour, where I could dream my dreams and build my castles in the air in peace.

I felt on this morning like a bird set free from a cage, and tasted that sweetest of youth's heritage, the delight, nay, the rapture, of being alive in a fair and beautiful world.

The park was very extensive, and I found my way from one of the turf glades to an alcove, raised on a bank above a small, close-shaven lawn, and commanding a view of an ornamental piece of water where swans were sailing, their snowy breasts glistening in the sun.

Beyond was a long stretch of copse and meadow, and the chalk heights of Wiltshire Downs, mellowed with the fine-weather haze of the September day, bounded the landscape. Nearer to the place where I sat was a basin, with a fountain, the crystal water flowing over the figure of a water nymph, carved in white marble, the edge of the fountain cut in many devices, and on these several birds were perched, preening their feathers after a dip in the water, the drops falling in showers as they shook their wings. I recall with vivid precision every little detail of this September morning. How a cone fell from a fir-tree near by, how a rabbit darted across the turf below the alcove, and the laugh of the woodpecker sounded in the still air.

I do not need to take all these details from my old diary. They are written on the tablets of memory, which the lapse of fifty, ay, more than fifty, years have no power to obliterate. Presently I heard a step of someone coming through the fir-wood to my right.

I started to my feet, and stood listening and expectant. I was somewhat in awe of Sir Melville, and, although I saw but little of him, I shared Virginia's dislike for Mr. Edgar Mervyn.

If it were either of these gentlemen coming I should quickly retrace my steps. It was neither one nor the other, but in another moment Mr. Willoughby came in sight.

"I am fortunate to find you here, Mistress Marjorie," he said, with his hat in his hand and a welcoming smile on his face. "My domain is honoured by your presence."

"Am I trespassing?" I asked, burning blushes betraying my agitation. "If I am on your estate I must be trespassing."

"A trespass which cannot be repeated too often," was the reply.

"I did not know. I thought I was in Sir Melville's park."

"You passed out of his park when you turned into the wood behind you. There is a little wicket-gate which marks the boundary, with a slight park railing, but my uncle and I are too good friends and neighbours to raise any barriers. One of my keepers had a board painted "No Thoroughfare," but I had it turned into firewood."

I was still standing, feeling shy and nervous, yet with a sense of happiness for which I could have given no reason, nor can I give it now. These subtle emotions have no words to express them. Their only language is that of the eyes, and speech is denied them. Perhaps I was a romantic, foolish child of sixteen, and I must crave for the patience of any who may chance to read my story, if they, never having had a like experience, may condemn me. Some may feel differently, for there is no sympathy in joys or sorrows like the sympathy of experience.

Mr. Willoughby stooped and picked up my bonnet, which I had untied, for the wide, black ribands had almost choked me, and it had fallen back from my head. He held it by the same ribands, and said, playfully,—

“Is this how you treat your headgear, Mistress Marjorie?”

“Oh, sir! Give it to me!” I exclaimed. “I ought not to have untied my bonnet.”

“Indeed! I think differently,” he said; and then, checking himself, he went on in a different tone,—“Give me news of poor Miss Virginia?”

“She is quite unable to move, sir, and it is a hard penance to lie stretched out on her back and be forbidden to use her hands.”

“Is it feared her spine is injured?”

“They speak of a severe strain, or sprain, and, if the doctor's orders are carried out, they hope she will quite recover.”

“I feel,” Mr. Willoughby said, “I am not without blame in the matter. I should have prevented Miss Virginia from mounting a horse full of spirit, which she was quite powerless to manage. I very deeply regret that I was not more decided in my warning.”

“Virginia is not easy to persuade if she is determined to do anything.”

“Ah!” he said, “so I should imagine. You are a great friend of Miss Beauchamp, I take it.”

“We were schoolfellows; and Virginia has been very kind to me. I had never had a friend till I met her at Miss Castle's.”

“No brothers nor sisters?”

“No, sir. I was the only child of my dear father,

the parson of Crowhurst, a little village a mile or more distant from Bradford. My father lived in retirement, and saw no company after he lost my mother. He only died in June, and I am quite alone in the world, as I have no relations. There are some cousins of my mother's, but they have not taken any heed of me."

Suddenly I remembered that I had no right to be talking so freely to Mr. Willoughby, and I stopped short.

He did not speak for a minute, and I was tormented with the idea that he thought me forward, and I began to walk toward the wood path, determined to say no more. What was my surprise and relief when Mr. Willoughby, walking by my side, said,—

"I remember your look of sympathy on that memorable evening when I was seized by the press-men. I heard your voice, or I am mistaken, and you expressed sorrow for my position. I have never forgotten it, or you."

My heart beat tumultuously, and I tried to hide what I felt.

"Virginia and I were together, sir. She was as sorry as I was."

He was still holding my bonnet by the strings, and I said,—

"May I ask you to give me my bonnet?"

"If so it pleases you, madame, but I think—"

I started at the sound of the report of a gun close to us, and put my hands to my ears.

Mr. Willoughby said,—

"Do not be alarmed, Mistress Marjorie. Ha! I thought as much," as Mr. Edgar Mervyn came out of a

by-path with a rabbit in his hand. "Shooting in my grounds, sir, and endangering the lives of those who may be passing unawares. I must beg you to give warning of your intentions in the future."

A very disagreeable laugh was the reply, as Mr. Edgar tossed the poor, dead rabbit to Mr. Willoughby, and said,—

"Take your valuable game, Willoughby. I am sorry to have disturbed such a delightful *tête-à-tête* as you were enjoying. Madame!"—to me, with mock courtesy and a low bow—"I beg ten thousand pardons if I scared you by the report of my fowling-piece. Do not look so alarmed; it is not loaded. I only took a stray shot at that beast. He was too tempting to resist, as he sat nibbling a bit of some delicacy he had found in the grass."

I was trembling from the shock of the report, which had, in truth, been very near us, and the shot might have struck me instead of the poor little rabbit, lying there with glazing eyes, and the blood trickling from a wound in its side. I could not bear to look at it lying dead, and to think of it five minutes before so full of happy life.

I took my bonnet from Mr. Willoughby, and hastily tied it under my chin with the broad, black ribands. I made Mr. Willoughby a curtsy, and beat a somewhat undignified retreat, leaving the two men together to settle their dispute.

Mr. Edgar Mervyn's laugh was repeated, and, I thought, at my expense.

I heard Mr. Willoughby's angry voice in reply, and hurried away. The glory of the day was over for me,

and tears were starting from my eyes. I dreaded meeting both gentlemen at dinner, and I knew Mrs. Beauchamp's sharp eyes would be upon me.

It was a relief to me to find that Virginia wished me to dine with her, and that a table had been set for me at the foot of her bed.

"Where have you been all this time, Marjorie? It's very cruel to leave me as you do."

"Mrs. Beauchamp was with you—you were not alone."

"I had rather be alone when mother is tiresome; she has been tiresome to-day. What is the use of lamenting over me and blaming me? I am sorry for poor daddy; *he* does love me and wants me. I can't write in reply to his letter; you must write for me. Oh, dear, Mr. Willoughby has not sent me any more flowers. Have you seen him?"

"Yes, in the park. I mean in his park, for I got in there by mistake."

"Oh, tell me what he said. Did he send me a message? Did he seem sorry for me?"

"Very sorry, I am sure."

"Tell me what he said. I am dying to know every word."

"He inquired for you, and said he blamed himself for suffering you to mount a horse you could not manage."

"I could have managed it if it had not shied at a boy coming in at the lodge gate. What else did he say, Marjorie?"

"That he was sorry for your pain, and I think that is all."

"No particular message? You look as if you were hiding something from me. It is very unkind. I sup-

pose you were so charmed, on your own account, to meet Willoughby that you forgot everything else—forgot me, and how I pine for the sight of Mr. Willoughby. You look very queer, Marjorie, as if something had—”

“Mr. Edgar Mervyn fired a fowling-piece close to us.”

“To *us*? Were you with Mr. Willoughby?”

“I told you I was,” I said crossly. “The gun frightened me, and no wonder. Mr. Edgar brought a dead rabbit in his hand and threw it at Mr. Willoughby, for he was in his grounds. Then I think they quarrelled, and I ran away. That is all.”

“I don’t believe it. I am certain Mr. Willoughby sent me a message, and you won’t give it to me because you are jealous.”

“Jealous! What have I to be jealous about?”

A dainty dinner was brought up on a silver tray for me, and Perkyns superintended Virginia’s meal. She was in a very ill temper, and said she might just as well feed herself as have her victuals poked down her throat by Perkyns.

“You aren’t to use your hands or arms, you know that. If you want to get well, you must do as you are told, and”—aside—“it will be the first time in your life if you do.”

Mrs. Beauchamp’s chariot drove up for her about four o’clock, and she came to bid her daughter good-bye.

“I wish you would send Cordelia to wait on me instead of Perkyns. I hate her ways, she is so old and dull. Do, mother, let me have Cordelia.”

“I will see about it and bring her, perhaps, next time I drive over. I don’t promise.”

“But you must promise, mother.”

To this Mrs. Beauchamp replied she feared Cordelia was too young, and not competent. "As Miss Mostyn is so kind as to remain here, and Lady Mervyn consents, I do not think you want a change or a young maid."

Of course Virginia began to cry, and Mrs. Beauchamp took leave of her in tears, saying,—

"Do not be foolish, Virginia; you have every blessing in this beautiful mansion, and are so well cared for. Be thankful and not discontented."

Such words were not likely to soothe a fractious, suffering invalid, and I felt sorry for her.

However, Virginia gained her point, and Perkyngs was replaced by Cordelia, a saucy, pert girl of twenty, whose face I disliked, and, indeed, I mistrusted her from the first; and I saw that Virginia was on more intimate terms with her than was suitable between a waiting-woman and a young mistress.

Lady Mervyn questioned me as to what I knew of Cordelia, but I could give no information, as I had seldom seen her at Hillside.

CHAPTER V.

DISCOVERY.

I WAS passing through the hall one morning a few days after the scene in the park, when Mr. Willoughby stopped me. We had not exchanged many words since that morning. He dined occasionally at the house, and came in for tea and cards in the evening sometimes. But I saw that when Mr. Edgar Mervyn was present he avoided any conversation with me. Indeed, I often tormented myself by thinking my trespass in his domain, of which he made light at the time, had really given him annoyance. I was therefore surprised when, as I was about to leave by the front door, he called me by name.

"Miss Mostyn, I am glad to know Miss Beauchamp is so much improved in health that she can use her pen."

"Do you mean, sir, that she can write?"

"Yes, I have had two notes from her, for which I must ask you to offer my thanks."

"But Virginia cannot write, sir; she is forbidden to lift her arms yet, or even her hands."

"Then it may be you are her amanuensis?" he said.

I was greatly distressed when he put the notes into my hand, for I saw at once they must have been written by Cordelia. I felt my cheeks burning guiltily, and Mr. Willoughby said,—

"I am sure you did this out of kindness to your friend."

"Sir!" I exclaimed, "pray believe that I did not write these notes. I should not have dreamed of doing so."

"Well," he said, replacing them in his pocket, "if such is the case, I should deem it disloyal to show them to you. Nay, Mistress Marjorie, do not look so distressed. I am, I confess, relieved to know you did not indite these letters, for," with a laugh, "there are some strange mistakes, and a great jumbling up of certain adjectives. Let the matter rest, and if you do not desire to do so, make no reference to these effusions. I am sorry for Miss Beauchamp's condition, and, as I said before, I blame myself for permitting her to ride Cosmo. I found her a very clever and attractive young lady, and her recitation of *King Henry the Fifth*, one evening when Lady Mervyn had guests, was very remarkable. Her dancing of the sarabande was really the poetry of motion. So far my admiration went, and I blame myself again for expressing it too warmly. This is said in confidence to you, Mistress Marjorie, and I leave it to your discretion how much or how little to repeat to Miss Beauchamp. Only it may be as well that she should not dictate any more notes to me in a like strain."

Oh! what had Virginia said? Had she so far forgotten herself as to write to Mr. Willoughby in the terms she often used when speaking of him to me? I felt ashamed and dismayed as well. How could I speak of such matters to Virginia without making a scene and throwing her back by one of her now less frequent fits of hysterical weeping?

I was standing the very picture of despair, when, to my disgust, Mr. Edgar Mervyn came softly from the little lobby which opened from the large entrance-hall.

"I seem fated to disturb *tête-à-têtes*, Mistress Mostyn. I crave pardon for the second time for intrusion."

Mr. Willoughby's face was aflame with indignation. Anything like deceit or double-dealing always roused the lion in him. He spoke with suppressed rage as he said,—

"There is an old saying as to eavesdroppers, and I would have you to know I utterly despise such means of gaining information."

"Now, my good cousin," Mr. Mervyn said, "I pray you be calm. The final part of the proverb does not hold good in this instance, for I heard no evil about myself. Indeed, I heard nothing. I was seeking for a fishing-rod which I thought I had left in the lobby, and coming out, I, for the second time, disturbed you in a position which any man might envy." Then with a mocking laugh Mr. Mervyn lounged away.

"I am sorry, Mistress Marjorie, that you should be subjected to such impertinence. It is almost beneath notice, and I regret I showed such heat. My chief desire is that you should not be disturbed by this fellow's rudeness. He is my kinsman, and owing to our relative positions, he the heir and I related on the female side only, perhaps he regards me as a too frequent visitor here; but I confess ever since our boyhood I have longed to repeat the thrashing I once gave him for telling a lie about me to my uncle. Think no more of what has passed, nor of these letters, if it distresses you. See, I will commit them to the flames and forget them."

Mr. Willoughby went to the open hearth, where a fire was always burning, summer and winter, and putting the two sheets of Bath post under a log, crunched it with the heel of his boot. The flames sprang up, and the paper was reduced to ashes, mingling with those which lay smouldering in white heaps on the hearth.

A secret has always been a burden to me to keep, and I felt almost guilty as I questioned whether or not I ought to tell Virginia that I knew of her employing Cordelia to write these notes.

I was ashamed for her and vexed with myself, that a secret uneasiness was underlying the shame for her, caused by the scarce acknowledged fear that Mr. Willoughby had given Virginia some cause to love him.

Admiration he confessed for her reciting and her dancing. Might that not have been misinterpreted, and was Virginia really to blame for having Mr. Willoughby so constantly in her thoughts? But there could be no excuse for letting a servant know what she felt, and employing her to write the letters which I had just seen consumed on the hearth in the hall.

I went out into the park. It was a dull, misty autumn day, and the grey sky seemed to brood over me. I have always been very much influenced by the weather. I could, as I have said, laugh and sing for very joy of heart in sunshine and fair surroundings of flowers and copse and woodland; but my mood this morning suited the heavy mist, which was more deserving the name of fog, moisture dripped from the trees, and the late flowers in the pleasance hung their heads, weeping for the departed summer.

I always avoided that part of the park which adjoined

Mr. Willoughby's grounds, and to-day I went in the opposite direction, walking fast, almost running, to allay the anxiety I felt as to what was to be my course with Virginia. I should feel a traitor if I did not tell her what had passed between me and Mr. Willoughby, yet I dreaded to give her the pain of humbled pride and disappointed love. I did not take much heed to where I was going, and I was close to Lady Mervyn before I saw her.

"Ah! Marjorie! I am glad I met you. I have been to our head gardener's cottage to see his daughter, who is dying, I fear, in a decline. She is so gentle and patient, I wish your poor friend could be like her."

"I think, madam, Virginia has been more contented of late, and when the three months are over, during which the doctors ordered her to lie perfectly flat and quiet, I am sure she will be happier."

"And able to be moved to Bath, perhaps. I wanted to ask you, Marjorie, about your future. If you have no home, make it with us. I shall want a governess for Bébé as she grows older, and when we are in London I shall be obliged to go to various routs and dinners, and to Court. It will be a comfort to me to know you are with Bébé in my absence. As soon as this poor girl is moved to Bath we shall go to London. Sir Melville has set his heart on having my portrait painted by Mr. Romney. I never sat to Mr. Gainsborough. It is said Mr. Romney succeeds well with women and children, and, of course, I must have Bébé with me. I shall love to have her in her sweet, innocent childhood perpetuated by the brush of a master in the art, and I hope Mr. Romney may agree to make the portrait the picture of a mother with

a child in her arms. What say you to my proposal that you should make a home with us till you make, as you no doubt will, a home for yourself with a good husband?"

"What can I say, madam, to express my gratitude to you? To be near you is indeed a joy to me, and nothing shall be wanting on my part to make Bébé happy when committed to my care."

"Then this matter is settled that you should accompany us to London. We rent a house in Cavendish Square this year, and do not intend to go to Windsor as in former years."

"Before I start, madam, may I go to Bradford to bid adieu to the Misses Castle, and gather together my books and small possessions? I also much desire to see Mr. Beauchamp to give him an account of Virginia's progress. I have also a friend in Mr. Orpin, and I shall like to bid adieu to my old nurse, who lives with the new parson in our little house at Crowhurst."

"You are free to come and go as it suits you," Lady Mervyn said. "And I shall be glad to hear from you about Mr. Beauchamp. I feel so much for him in his invalid condition."

I parted from Lady Mervyn in the hall and went to our rooms—Virginia's and mine—in the wing of the mansion. As I passed into the corridor on which the rooms opened I met Cordelia hurrying along. When she saw me she turned back and retired hastily into a small closet where unused furniture was kept. I called her by name and asked her if her mistress had sent her to seek for me.

"I suppose," the girl said, with a saucy toss of her

head, "I may go an errand without asking your leave, Mistress Mostyn?"

I was quick to notice she was concealing something under her apron, and I boldly asked,—

"What have you there, Cordelia?"

"That's no odds to you. I am not your maid-servant, I hope."

It required some resolution to reply,—

"At anyrate, I would fain see what you want to conceal."

"If you must know, then, it's a letter."

"Written by whom?"

"By me, to my mother at Bradford. Now, I hope you are easy, miss. I wouldn't be a Paul Pry if I was you. It ain't the thing for a parson's daughter."

With this insolent speech Cordelia darted past me, and was down the corridor and out of sight in a moment. I felt pretty sure the letter was another of the effusions of which Mr. Willoughby had told me, and though I trembled with fear as to the consequence I determined to let my meeting with Cordelia lead up to what I had to say. I found Virginia flushed and excited. She called for her salts and some spirits of red lavender, which the doctor had ordered should only be given her very cautiously, when she was faint and exhausted, to revive her. I held the salts to her nose, and she said,—

"I want the reviving stuff. I am not well."

"You are feverish, Virginia. The doctor said you were not to have a dose unless you were cold and your pulse low."

"You are hatefully unkind, Marjorie. I don't believe you care two straws about me."

"I care very much," I replied. "I fear Cordelia is not near as good a waiting-woman for you as Perkyns."

"I like her ten times better. She is obliging and civil."

"I met her as I was coming to your room with a letter in her hand. She said it was to her mother. If it was, I wonder she was so anxious to hide it."

Virginia turned her head away, and began to sigh and say she felt so ill she must have the restorative. I took her hand in mine, and feeling it was burning hot, I said I dared not give it to her, but offered her a drink of lemon-water. This she refused, and she kept her head turned from me. I felt it was now or never that I must speak.

"Do you not think Cordelia is likely to deceive you? I do not fancy that letter was to her mother. I fear, dear, it was written at your dictation to someone else!"

"You are cruel! cruel!" she said, bursting into one of her fits of weeping. "You don't know what it is to lie here and have a cup of bliss dashed from your lips just as you were taking it. Never to hear of him I love; to get no news of him—only once—only once—these flowers."

"So the letter was written by Cordelia to Mr. Willoughby. Oh, Virginia, I can hardly bear to tell you, but it is true. Mr. Willoughby gave me to understand he did not wish to get any more such letters written by a servant's hand."

"It's a lie! He never said so."

"It is true," I replied, "and I am glad it has been found out. You will be glad, too, some day."

"Glad! I shall die of grief! Did he—could he dare to show you the letters?"

"He offered to show them to me, or rather give them to me, because he actually thought I had written them for you."

"And you took them and read them? Oh, I shall never forgive you—never!"

"I should indeed have been base if I had read them," I replied. "No one can ever read them now, for they are burnt to ashes."

"Who burnt them?"

"Mr. Willoughby himself. It was the kindest thing he could do."

I was terribly sorry for poor Virginia. There are few situations more distressing than when it falls to our lot to tax another with deceit, and there is no possibility of evasion. Virginia had been very foolish; and more, had been unwomanly, and had placed herself in a humiliating position.

As she lay, sobbing and moaning, refusing any words of comfort—and, indeed, I had few to offer—my heart ached for her, and, as before, I had a secret uneasiness that it might be Mr. Willoughby had given her reason to think he really cared for her. If so, there was some excuse for her. I had never seen them together. I had only Virginia's word for it that Mr. Willoughby had shown plainly enough how greatly he admired her.

What consolation could I offer? What could I do to restore poor Virginia to composure?

"Get the letter back," she moaned. "Run after Cordelia and say I desire her to give it to you. If you love me, if you don't wish me to die outright, do this for

me. Cordelia was to take it to the house—to his house. Go at once! I pray you.”

“But I cannot leave you thus, now you are so distressed.”

“You can leave me. You must leave me. Do as I bid you.”

There seemed nothing else left for me but to comply with her request, and save her the humiliation of thinking another letter was to be read and destroyed by him to whom it was addressed. I was very fleet of foot, and fortune favoured me. Cordelia must have waited to gossip in the servants’ hall as she passed out, for I saw her only half-way across the path which led to the back entrance of Down House, as Mr. Willoughby’s modest residence was called. I overtook Cordelia just as she reached a gate leading into the shrubbery.

“I am sent by your mistress,” I said, “for a letter you have about you.”

“Letter? Lor’! What letter do you mean? I told you I had written to my mother.”

“You told a falsehood. That letter you tried to hide was intended for Mr. Willoughby. Your mistress desires that you will give it to me.”

“You’ll like to read it, I’ll warrant. I daresay you are jealous such a fine gentleman isn’t your lover.”

“I will not suffer you to speak to me thus. I shall report your conduct to Mrs. Beauchamp.”

Cordelia changed her tone and began to whimper.

“I did it to oblige,” she said. “I am that sorry for poor Miss Virgy I’d do anything to please her. Don’t tell Mrs. Beauchamp. Pray, miss, don’t.”

She gave the letter into my hands, and not wishing

to be seen, or met, walking with Cordelia, I turned over the wet turf, and then took a circuitous path to the house.

I held the letter in my hand, and was debating with myself whether to tear it to fragments or take it to Virginia, when I saw, to my chagrin, Mr. Mervyn coming towards me.

"Whither away, fair Mistress Marjorie? You rival a young fawn in the swiftness of your movements. Yonder fleet-footed maiden had not a chance of outrunning you. Nay, do not hasten, now your errand is accomplished," he said, and I knew his eyes were upon the letter in my hand.

I remembered that an hour before he had probably heard what had passed between me and Mr. Willoughby and must have a shrewd suspicion as to the letter I held. I tried to appear unconcerned, but my heart beat so that I could hear its throbs.

"It draws near the dinner hour, sir; there is no time to waste, or we shall be late."

"No time is wasted that is spent with you, Mistress Marjorie. You have brought much sunshine into this large and stately mansion, and, forsooth, we want a little brightening. My lady stepmother is too good for me, and is wrapt up in that child Béb , who is no beauty. In truth, everyone about here is too good for me, including my cousin of the Down House. I am nought but a guest here. I get my fling in Bath, and I shall hope to see you there ere long. You will be the cynosure of many eyes; and let me pray that you will grant me your hand in the ball-rooms where all the fashion and

beauty of the time trip to the sound of enchanting music."

This long rhodomontade lasted till we were nearly at the great entrance. Here, to my great relief, I saw Sir Melville. He did not often speak to me, or appear to notice me, but as he walked up the marble steps of the portico by my side he said,—

"My lady tells me you are to go to London with us and look after Bébé. I am glad to hear it. I hope she will be more tractable than the young lady you attend to upstairs. Poor thing! We all pity her, and I for one shall be glad to see her walking again, still better, dancing. She was a vastly graceful dancer—eh, Roland?"

We were in the hall now, and Mr. Willoughby was reading the news by the fire.

"Come, man, speak up. You know you never took your eyes off her the night when my Lord Weymouth supped here."

Mr. Willoughby looked annoyed, but he said coolly,—

"You were not far behind me in admiration, sir, unless my memory deceives me."

I heard no more, for I hastened to my room to prepare for dinner, first taking the letter to poor Virginia.

She had grown calmer, and said,—

"Kiss me, Marjorie, and, oh, pity me!"

Yes, I did pity her, and I strove to judge her with leniency. What I had heard drop from Sir Melville

again sent me off questioning, "Had poor Virginia a cause for what she *felt*? Never for what she *did*."

She could scarce turn her arm to put the letter under her pillow, but she managed to do it, though I saw her wince with pain. Was she ever to recover, or was she to lie there for her life, debarred from all that made life fair to her?

Lady Mervyn had given me some pretty frocks, and though I still wore crape, my dress, being made by a skilled mantua-maker, was relieved with white and cut according to the prevailing mode. My hair was fluffed and curled and I had a dainty hood, with little tufts of white ribands inserted in the quilling of fine muslin within the hood. I did not wonder that when I arrived at Miss Castle's, after an absence of scarcely three months, they started with surprise at the sight of me.

Miss Betty could not restrain herself from expressions of admiration, which elicited from Miss Castle, "Marjorie needs no praise from you. Flattery offends all right-thinking women, and I am pleased to believe that Marjorie has repaid my care of her, and is above any foolish vanity." Although, during my first evening, Miss Castle reproved her sister for undue curiosity, which she denounced as vulgar, I saw the details of Virginia's condition, of the grandeur of Bromley Park, and the mention of any titled people who had visited them while I was there, had a great interest and charm for the good old lady.

Evidently I brought reflected lustre from Bromley Park, and that her ladyship had offered to take me as a governess to her only child was an honour due in part

to the excellent education I had received at Miss Castle's establishment.

"It was," Miss Castle said, "highly gratifying to find a pupil of hers had been considered able to undertake the training of Sir Melville Mervyn's daughter."

I paid a visit to the schoolroom after tea in the parlour with Miss Castle, two or three elder girls, and one of the weary governesses, who was invited, as a special favour, to meet me. The dull schoolroom, with its benches and desks, its drab walls, where several maps, dim with age, hung, sent back my thoughts to Virginia's first entrance into that room. How bright and gay she was. How she would mount on a form and recite Shakespeare to an admiring throng. How, at the dancing-lessons from Monsieur Perrot, who came over from Bath, she would perform a *pas seul*, and often improvise a dance with a grace of movement which might well be called by Mr. Willoughby "the poetry of motion."

Fitful as was her mood, with all the characteristics of a spoiled girl, she was eminently attractive, and the girls all crowded round me to ask how she did, and if it was really true that she had broken her back. I could only say I hoped with time and care in following the doctor's orders she would recover, but it was sad indeed to picture Virginia as she had been, when I had her image before me as she lay prostrate on the bed at Bromley Park.

I slept in the room I had latterly, at her request, shared with Virginia, and lay awake recalling the romances which she spun out of her fertile brain, about gallant knights and fair ladies, and love-stories with sad

or joyful endings as the case might be. Yes, there was much to love in Virginia. She had made the parson's daughter, in her shabby cloth frock and thick linen kerchief, her friend, and as I thought of her my pillow was wet with tears.

CHAPTER VI.

THE OLD PARSONAGE AGAIN.

It was strange to me to stand at the Parsonage gate and see Tilly sweeping the dead leaves from the doorstep, too intent at first to notice me.

When at last she looked up she gave a start, threw down her broom, and came towards me with her bare arms outstretched. Suddenly she stopped short.

"I never!—I can't kiss such a grand young lady! But your face is the same."

"If you won't kiss the grand young lady, she means to kiss you."

"Then you aren't set up and changed? Crabbe's son saw you riding in a fine coach out in the country t'other day, and he said you'd never come nigh us any more."

"Jack Crabbe was always a stupid boy. I wonder you listened to him."

"But come in, come in; I am main sorry you catch me like this at work. I could not see the dead leaves drifting in at the porch. The parson wouldn't care if the whole place was filled with 'em."

"Where is the parson?" I asked.

"Out praying and preaching, though it ain't eleven o'clock. He is a good soul, I daresay; but there's more things to be done than praying. He is a Methody, you

know, and thinks he is going to convert the whole place. He has been at Mr. Orpin, I hear, telling him he must own he is a sinner before he can get peace."

Tilly was very voluble on the subject, and when we got into the old familiar parlour I saw the table covered with books and pamphlets.

"The rooms are filled with tracts," Tilly said, "and the parson spends a lot of money buying them; and I could tell him dozens of the folks use 'em to light the fires. They can't read 'em for one thing, and they wouldn't read 'em if they could for another. I don't pretend to read 'em, and I tell his reverence I am no scholar, and it's hard work to follow the Psalms as he reads 'em in church. I just make out a word here and there. I know, 'Selah' when I see it."

While Tilly talked I was thinking over past days. There are times in life when a day counts for a year, and others when a year is like a day. It seemed to me more like years than months since I had come to the Parsonage to hear I was an orphan and my dear father was gone. That June day, with all its flowers and sunshine, was a contrast to the late November morning when I visited my old home.

I went all over the little house; it was silent and deserted. The parson only used three rooms, and my little chamber smelt musty, for the window-curtain was closely drawn, and no breath of air could enter it. Involuntarily I went to the lattice and pulled aside the curtain and opened the window. As I did so a robin fluttered down from the stone cornice, where he had built his nest.

"Oh, Tilly!" I exclaimed, "when did you open my window last?"

"Dear heart! I don't open windows when there's no one to bide in a room."

"Look at this robin. Poor little fellow! how frightened he is."

At this Tilly began to throw up her hands, and cry out that a robin in the house meant death, and that she wished I hadn't meddled, by opening the window and letting him in.

"Perhaps it is as well that I did meddle, and let a little air in," I said; and to my great satisfaction the robin flew from the open casement and got free.

"There's his reverence," Tilly said; "I hear his footstep. You must go down and see him. I'll just tell him you are here," and Tilly trudged downstairs, her heavy, creaking footsteps shaking the house.

I left the lattice open and followed her.

The parson, Mr. Whittaker, was young, but very solemn in his manner. He asked me if I would stay to his midday dinner as if he were inviting me to a funeral feast.

I declined his offer, and then he said he was sorry to hear I was living with very worldly people, and that he feared I had not found the right way.

"Lady Mervyn is very good, sir, and it can only do anyone good to live with her."

"Goodness, Mistress Mostyn, is a fallacy, unless it springs from the right source—it is only filthy rags."

"Oh, sir!" I said, "I cannot think that is true."

"I have the Scriptures for my authority," was the reply. "I feel a deep interest in you, and I would

fain have you snatched as a brand from the burning."

As Mr. Whittaker spoke he was standing before me, as I sat on the one available chair in the little study, and gazing down on me with real compassion, I am sure.

He went on with a long discourse, which had in it the doctrines of those who were called Wesleyans, after the founder of the sect. Too often these doctrines were used as a mere shibboleth by his disciples, but they were the very life of Wesley's own soul, and for them he was content to be regarded as an outcast from the Church he loved that he might proclaim his message to the world.

Many men like Mr. Whittaker remained in the Church, and with zeal preached, as they said, to the lost sheep who were wandering, uncared for, in the wilderness of the world. Noble and self-denying men, they deserve to be held in grateful remembrance, though their efforts for converting the careless and the ignorant were very often not tempered with wisdom, and in many cases transitory emotion was mistaken for lasting conversion.

As I write this, and recall that hour passed in my father's old study with his successor, I am bound to confess his words made their mark on me; and just as I recorded the awaking of consciousness in my earliest childhood to my own part in the beautiful world around me, so now I knew that my soul too was first stirred within me by Mr. Whittaker's words, and I recognised what the happiness must be of the children of God, as he said, "accepted in the beloved."

After leaving the Parsonage I stood for a few minutes by my father's grave, and read his name added to the

inscription on a simple headstone which recorded my young mother's death, with the words beneath, "The light of my eyes is gone from me." She was but twenty-two. My father was much older, for he was sixty when he died. Under his name and age he had left instructions that "In Thy light we shall see light" should be added. And there was yet a space on the slab of Portland stone for me. I thought, "I shall lie here. There is room for my name."

This was many years ago, and by God's mercy my name is not yet on the old headstone, nor do I think, when my time comes, I shall be buried in that little churchyard, but rest near one I buried elsewhere.

I spent an hour with the good parish clerk, Mr. Orpin, and he was inclined, like Miss Betty Castle, to be too flattering in his remarks on my changed appearance. But he ended at last with "Beauty is skin deep, and my dear missie knows that is true and does not want me to tell her so."

I returned to Miss Castle's for the one o'clock dinner, and then begged to be allowed to go up to Hillside.

"I walk fast," I said, "and I shall be back before dark."

"No, my dear Marjorie, I cannot permit you to go unattended. The example would not be good for my pupils. I felt a little uneasy when you went alone to Crowhurst. You started early, and I did not like to thwart you. But that was in the forenoon, and there was no fear of your being overtaken by darkness. So, if you please, I shall desire my sister Betty to accompany you. I would do so, but it is the afternoon for

the dancing-master, and I make a point, as you know, of being present."

Whether I liked this plan of Miss Castle's or not, I found it gave the greatest delight to poor Miss Betty. She had never been inside Hillside, and it was in her eyes a very grand house. I thought so too till I had seen Bromley Park, which had quite eclipsed the grandeur of Hillside.

Miss Betty was a good deal flustered as we climbed the steep drive to the house.

"I am afraid of Madam Beauchamp, dear; she is so haughty. Perhaps I had better sit in the hall while you go in."

"No, Miss Betty," I said, "you must come in; and you will like to see the fine things in the drawing-room. There is a fire-screen worked in tent stitch by Mrs. Beauchamp, which you will admire."

We rang the bell hanging in the porch, and after some delay a footman answered the summons.

"Mrs. Beauchamp is gone to Bath for two days, Miss Mostyn."

"I am come to see Mr. Beauchamp, if you please, and will you show Miss Castle to the drawing-room?"

"There's no fire there to-day," the man said, "as madam is abroad." Then, with a somewhat satirical glance at poor Miss Betty's cloak, with its two capes of grey cloth, and her beaver bonnet, which had seen many winter storms, "Step into this room, if you please," the man said, "and I will let Mr. Beauchamp know Miss Mostyn wishes to wait on him."

The room was really a cloak-room opening out of the hall, and there were no fine things for Miss Betty to look at.

I said I was sorry; but she exclaimed in a subdued whisper, as if afraid of being heard, "This is quite a nice parlour, dear, and a bright fire; and oh! there are guns hung up. I hope it is safe."

They were old fowling-pieces and pistols which Mr. Beauchamp would never use again.

"They have not been loaded for years," I said. "You needn't be afraid."

"Oh, no! I am not afraid—not at all. And there's a case of stuffed birds—very interesting. I like natural history."

I was soon summoned to Mr. Beauchamp's room, and I was welcomed with a pathetic smile.

"I am glad you have come at last to give an old father some news of his poor girl." And looking earnestly at me he said, "You are welcome for your own sake as the flowers in May. I have not been so well of late. Mrs. Beauchamp is set upon taking a house in Bath, and putting me and Virginia through a course of the waters. I have tried them before and no good came of it. But tell me of Virginia."

I gave as hopeful an account as I could, but I feared she would not be able to bear the journey to Bath yet awhile.

"I lie here and long for a sight of her and the sound of her voice. She did contrive to brighten my life a little. If she could only write to me."

"She cannot do that, sir, yet; but I can tell you there is every hope she will recover."

"How does she look? But indifferently well, I expect?"

"No. Virginia does not look amiss. She has a good appetite, and everything that she can want is provided for her. Lady Mervyn is very good to her."

"I am grateful—let her know this. I fear Mrs. Beauchamp does not express enough gratitude to her ladyship."

This was true. It often surprised me that she took all that was done for Virginia as a matter of course, saying to me that, as it was Sir Melville's vicious horse that caused the accident it was incumbent on Lady Mervyn to do everything she could for Virginia. The horse was not vicious. It was solely due to Virginia's inability to ride any horse that she was thrown.

"Who is this Mr. Willoughby the child mentioned in her letters to me when she first went to Bromley Park? I know nought of him. Virginia gave me to understand in the last letter written before her accident that he was her devoted slave."

The colour rushed to my face as I thought of all that had passed about the letters. Mr. Beauchamp noticed my confusion, and said, with a smile,—

"What! Has he proved too fascinating for you also?"

"Mr. Willoughby is a very well-mannered gentleman, sir, and he has been exceedingly kind to both Virginia and me, but I do not think there was anything particular in his attentions to—to either of us."

"Ah, well! I would not press the matter. I have a book and a letter ready to send to Virginia by the carrier. Take them to her, with my fond love. And can you read to me? My eyes cannot bear the strain for long."

"Yes, sir, gladly. What shall I read?"

To my surprise he put his hand on a large Bible on a table near him and said,—

"Something out of this, if you do not object."

With the memory of what Mr. Whittaker had said to me the day before, I was glad to have the opportunity of reading from the Book which he had said, and truly, was the best of books. There was a mark in St. Luke's Gospel, and I read where the Bible opened. It was the beautiful story, long unheeded by me, of the lost sheep and the lost piece of silver. When I had finished, Mr. Beauchamp was silent for a few minutes, then he said,—

"I lie here and wonder if I am the lost sheep that the Shepherd seeks till He finds it. It is good to think He would rejoice if He found me—*if* He did find me!"

I was touched almost to tears to hear these words from the lips of the once strong man, who was now reduced almost to the weakness of a child. I could only say, in broken accents,—

"I think, sir, He will find you, and I hope He will find me too." I left Mr. Beauchamp soon after.

The great move was made to London early in December, and a new chapter in my life began.

About the same time Virginia was removed to a house on the Parade at Bath, and Mr. Beauchamp was also conveyed thither, although, as I knew, most unwilling to attempt the journey; nor, indeed, was he fit to bear it.

Mrs. Beauchamp was the ruling spirit, and although I do not doubt she believed the waters would be of benefit to both the invalids, I cannot but think that she

was also quite ready to participate in the gaiety of the Pump-room, and the balls and routs which she could not enjoy at Hillside.

As I look back on these days, and write of Mrs. Beauchamp, I would fain not judge her too severely. She was a woman of fashion, and had set her hopes on Virginia coming forth as a wit and a genius, if not a beauty. Disappointed in this hope, and having no womanly tenderness as a nurse of the sick, she was glad to divert herself with the society of Bath, under the pretext of the known benefit which was said to result to complaints like Mr. Beauchamp's from the celebrated waters. Mrs. Beauchamp's was undoubtedly a cold, selfish nature, and when Virginia was in good health and spirits she could be proud of her and liked her company. But there was as much irritation and vexation as sorrow about her present state; and I saw Lady Mervyn's kindness to me did not please her. She had expected me to be a sort of useful friend and companion to Virginia, and from the time she knew that I was to accompany Lady Mervyn to London she was very distant in her manner to me, and, indeed, failed in the most ordinary civility towards me. I did venture to suggest that I thought Perkyns was a more suitable attendant on Virginia than Cordelia. This was a crowning offence, and I was requested to remember my position, and that it was exceedingly impertinent in a young woman of seventeen to dictate to her superior in age as well as rank; and she never failed to make me feel that a great gulf lay between the lady of a squire and a parson's daughter.

CHAPTER VII.

LONDON TOWN.

I HAD never taken a journey of more than a few miles before, and the novelty was so great that I forgot fatigue. I travelled in a coach with Bébé and her nurse, Sir Melville and Lady Mervin in their chariot, while the bulk of the luggage had preceded us; but there were yet a good many packages left, which followed in a third carriage, with servants. Sir Melville's chariot was drawn by his own four horses. Mine and the servants' found post-horses waiting us at certain places on the road. It amused me greatly to watch the country people as we passed running out to see the equipage and staring at us with open mouths; but some had angry faces, which alarmed me.

I could not understand at first why two postilions, well armed with muskets, rode alongside of Sir Melville's chariot. So entirely had I lived out of the world that the sound of the great surging sea of death and destruction, which was deafening all sweeter sounds in France, only reached my ears as the echo of a distant storm reaches the ears when the sky above is bright and clear, and the storm-clouds lie in a far horizon.

Yet, as I look back, what a year was this, as we were driving unmolested on the King's highway, across the narrow sea which divides England from France;

deeds of unexampled cruelty and wickedness were literally making the streets of Paris run with blood.

That a King and Queen had fallen by the will of a frantic people I knew indeed, but, as is too common, my own little cares and little duties at school in that fateful year of 1793 had engrossed me. Besides, France was far off then; tidings were slow to reach England even at its capital, and very slow to reach the country districts.

The story of our own martyred King, of which I had read in one of Miss Castle's dry history catechisms, haunted me more than the bare facts I heard of the murder of King Louis XVI. and his beautiful hapless Queen, Marie Antoinette.

This may seem strange to those who read my story, but in these blissful days of peace under our young Queen, when we hear of railways being made to take us swiftly over a journey like mine from Wiltshire to London in 1794, when there is a probability of electric wires carrying news in all directions in a few moments, when our letters reach their destination by a penny paid for a Queen's head on the cover, and heavy payment for postage, or the alternative of seeking for franks from members of Parliament and noblemen is no longer needful, it is difficult for the young generation to realise what were the conditions of a girl's life fifty years before the day I am writing this history.

Our Queen has now been on the throne for seven years—seven years of prosperity they have been—and peace abroad and safety at home have so far marked her reign. What the next half century may bring of discoveries, and how far science may have effected even

greater things than it has already done, who can say? It is strange for the old to look on, perhaps, as in my case, with a sort of hungry curiosity, and to feel a sudden pang that, whatever may happen, no tidings of great events will reach us in the silence of the grave, whither even the young are hastening, but which must be in the near future to the old.

I said the angry looks and words of some of the people, as Sir Melville's chariot drew up before an inn, were then a puzzle to me. It was, as I knew later, not from personal animosity to him or his lady, but the revolutionary spirit which had wrought such fearful consequences in France had spread to our own country, and discontent, and hatred of the aristocracy were rife.

We were a week on the road, going out of our way to halt at Clifton Hot Wells. Lady Mervyn was anxious to visit some acquaintances at Goldney House, the grounds of which boasted a wonderful grotto and had lately attained notoriety by being chosen by Miss Burney for a scene in *Evelina*. We remained at the Spa for three days. The great rocks standing up by the banks of the river filled me with amazement. They were my very first acquaintance with Nature in her more rugged aspect. Bristol proved to be an interesting and ancient city, well worthy of a visit. The waters of the hot springs of Clifton were considered very beneficial for diseases of the lungs, and we saw many sad-looking invalids with hectic flushes on their cheeks, and heard the little, short, dry cough, which is a feature of consumption, as they sipped the waters, in many cases with difficulty.

Pearson, Bébé's nurse, was in a constant state of

alarm if the evening closed in before we reached our destination for the night. She told stories of highwaymen, and how pistols were held to travellers' heads till they gave up their money or their jewels. Mrs. Pearson said she knew for a fact that many gentlemen of breeding took to the road, and made a living out of it. "Then, after they have got a large booty they return to their place in society, and no one finds them out. Even such gentlemen as Mr. Willoughby have done it, and are doing it every night, and sometimes in open day."

The notion of Mr. Willoughby turning highwayman was so extraordinary that I laughed at Pearson suggesting such a thing.

"Well," she said, "when these young sparks are pressed for money they will do anything to get it to pay their debts. This is gospel truth, Mistress Mostyn, though you don't believe me, I see."

We reached London late one evening in the first week in December.

Bébé had been sometimes transferred to her mother's carriage, and she had been very docile and tractable on the long journey. She was in my arms and seated on my lap when we got into the town.

The link boys were running about with their flaming torches. Here and there a dull oil lamp was hanging, especially in the streets as we neared Cavendish Square. Bébé was delighted to watch the flickering torches; and a chair, borne by lacqueys, and attended by the link-boys, being in our way in a narrow thoroughfare, it came to a stop just by our carriage. A lady tapped at the window, and a clear voice asked in sonorous tones what occasioned the delay.

As we moved slowly on, her chair moved too; and just as we stopped in Cavendish Square, to allow Sir Melville and Lady Mervyn to alight, I saw the lady step out of the chair. She was very tall and majestic, and gave orders to the chairmen in a voice which could be heard at any distance, I should think. I saw by the flickering light jewels flashing in her dark hair, and I felt sure she was a lady of quality. Such, indeed, was the case, though the "quality" was that of genius. I heard afterwards that it was the great actress, Mrs. Siddons, who was attending an assembly that night at a house which was a resort of many well-known people who moved in the fashionable world of London.

I well remember my feelings of depression when first I went to my bedroom on the top floor of the house. On my first awaking, at eight o'clock on the day after our arrival, I thought it was still night, so pitch dark was my little chamber, with its sloping roof. Mrs. Pearson, Bébé's nurse, was scarcely better pleased. She struck a light on the tinder-box and lit my tallow candle.

"I can scarce see my fingers to do it," she said. "I am letting the blessed child sleep. I haven't the heart to wake her. I wish her ladyship had left her at Bromley Park, with you and me to take care of her. I never can abide London; but last time we came up it was to Windsor, and that is a different matter. Your eyes aren't blinded with fogs. I declare I can't see the houses opposite," Pearson said, as she drew aside a stuff curtain.

Lady Mervyn sent me a message by her waiting-woman that she wished me to breakfast with Bébé, and when I got to the nursery, on the floor below my bed-

room, things looked more cheerful. Pearson had a large fire and basins of hot bread-and-milk ready. Tea was a luxury that did not find its way to schoolrooms and nurseries in those days, and bread-and-milk and porridge were the staple commodity, with sometimes hot bread and hot toast.

Bébé was a docile child, and easy to manage. I taught her a text from the Bible every morning, and she soon knew her letters, and could spell little words.

It was just before Christmas, when I was seated at my tapestry-frame in the inner drawing-room, that the folding-door was gently pushed back, and to my surprise I saw Mr. Mervyn come in. I had ever a distaste to Mr. Mervyn, and hated his familiar manner.

"All alone, little Marjorie? Nay, that is too bad," and he sprawled on a couch by the fire, and, producing his gold snuff-box, took a pinch. "Are you not vastly dull sitting here stitching? Put your work away, and come with me to see the show for Christmas. Some of the shops in Bond Street are full of pretty knick-knacks. Come, get your hood."

"I did not know you were in town, sir," I replied.

"That's no answer to my question. I know you are moped to death. My stepmother ought to be ashamed of treating you thus."

"What do you mean, sir?" I said, gathering up my silks and drawing the cover over my frame. "I am not dull, I am not moped, and—"

"You are not leaving the room? Nay, that is cruel. Do you know, I came to spend Christmas in town solely for the delight of seeing you. I am first in the field, if even, as is probable, my most worthy cousin Roland

follows me. Not that I am sure he will do so. He is engaged just now in Bath gaieties, and dancing attendance on that interesting invalid, Miss Virginia Beauchamp. Her devoted slave, so I am told."

I was not versed in the art of hiding what I felt, and I said angrily,—

"I do not wish to have any more of your company, sir. I am desired by Lady Mervyn to take an airing with Bébé at noon. The chariot must be round, for I hear the clock striking."

I tried to walk with dignity to the folding-doors. I am afraid I did not succeed, but rather ran than walked.

Mr. Mervyn laughed as he said,—

"Hot haste, hot haste, Mistress Marjorie; more haste less speed," and before I could turn the handle and move the heavy door aside he had come up to me, and put his arm round my waist to detain me.

Happily for me the folding-doors fastened in the middle, and thus, through the small space I had managed to force open, my tormentor caught sight of Sir Melville, who was reading the news by the fire.

Instantly Mr. Mervyn's manner and voice changed.

He held the door for me to pass, with a low bow, and addressing his father, said,—

"Good-day to you, sir. I was seeking for Lady Mervyn and inquiring of Mistress Mostyn where I am most like to find her."

"You here, Edgar! How does that come about? I left you to look after the tenants at Christmas."

"Surely, sir, your agent and head bailiff are enough to manage matters."

I heard no more, for I had left the room, but I saw Mr. Edgar Mervyn's arrival was not a pleasant surprise to Sir Melville.

Lady Mervyn had made a dressing-room adjoining her bedroom her boudoir. The accommodation of a London house was at the best very different from the spacious corridors and nobly-proportioned chambers and rooms of a mansion like Bromley Park.

Cavendish Square was much sought after then as now as a fashionable quarter, and Lady Mervyn had chosen to spend a few weeks there to be near Mr. Romney's studio, where I was also to pass some hours in attendance upon Lady Mervyn and Bébé. The sittings did not begin till January, and from that time till the picture was finished I was continually present. Mr. Romney had much to tell of London life, and there I heard anecdotes of the great Mrs. Siddons.

"She is killing herself with overwork," Mr. Romney said. "Her baby, Cecilia, was born last year, and instead of giving herself proper rest she was actually playing 'Macbeth' at Drury Lane—the wilderness of a place, she calls it—straining her voice, till I marvel she did not crack her vocal cords. But 'Macbeth' is put on the stage as it has never been before. You must see it, my lady, and let this little lady"—nodding at me from behind the easel—"see the great lady in it. Mrs. Siddons has been opening a theatre for her son at Edinburgh, to help that hopeful youth to make a name. It will be his mother's name, if he does make it at all, which I doubt."

There was some discussion as to the position in which Lady Mervyn should be taken. Mr. Romney tried

several before he was satisfied. He was not apparently anxious to introduce Béb  into the picture; but her mother said it was her great desire to have B   , as she said, immortalised in her sweet childhood by Mr. Romney's art.

One day on our arrival at the studio B    became a little fractious, and cried that she didn't like the room, and was afraid of all the stone men and women standing by. She meant the casts of many well-known statues, which were placed against the walls of the artist's studio.

Lady Mervyn had taken B    in her arms, and comforted her by saying if she were good and kept quiet she should have a trinket for her very own which was suspended by a ribbon from her mother's neck. The child was pacified, and nestled close to her mother, laying her head against her neck, and looked out with her lovely dark eyes at Mr. Romney when he came into the studio. He stopped at the threshold and cried,—

"My lady, do not move—do not stir, I pray you! I have it—I have it!" he exclaimed triumphantly. "Yes, I have it at last—a mother and child which may stand beside any of good Sir Joshua's."

It was indeed a lovely picture. I could not wonder at the artist's delight in it. And day by day it grew to life and ideal loveliness on the canvas. There were visitors to the studio as the picture neared completion, and amongst them Mrs. Piozzi and Madame D'Arblay, with others, who were acquainted personally with Lady Mervyn.

Madame D'Arblay was a prim little lady in a large black hat. She dealt in many stilted expressions of admiration, and I could but notice how coldly Mr. Rom-

ney received them. Then, finding him so little affected by her opinion, the little lady turned her attention to me.

"You would make a pleasing portrait. I know Mr. Romney thinks so. You are so *piquante*, and have really a sweet mouth."

This outspoken flattery was very distasteful, especially before witnesses, and I coloured with vexation.

"Fanny," Mrs. Piozzi said, "can't you see your compliments make the poor child feel awkward?"

Madame D'Arblay smiled demurely. "None of us object to compliments, however much we may pretend to dislike them, and I know you have enjoyed many in your time."

"Oh!" Mrs. Piozzi exclaimed. "Few indeed compared with those the shy little author of *Evelina* has had addressed to her."

I heard afterwards there had been a coolness in the friendship of these two ladies owing to the second marriage of Mrs. Piozzi, for which her admirer, Dr. Johnson, had never forgiven her.

"I have only torn myself away from Bookham to visit my father in town for a day or two," said Madame D'Arblay, changing the subject adroitly. "Monsieur D'Arblay will tear his hair if I pass the limit of separation he allows me."

The little lady chattered on for some time about various things, such as her husband's love of gardening and Mr. Boswell's life of the great doctor, of which the world of letters was then talking. There was an extraordinary fascination in listening to her. She had no beauty of feature, but I never saw a face with such change of expression. Mouth and eyes always animated,

and the gestures of her small hands as she played with her fan were suited to her words and smiles.

I had not read her novels, *Evelina* and *Cecilia*, when I saw Madame D'Arblay in Mr. Romney's studio, but Lady Mervyn lent me the books after I had seen the authoress, and they beguiled many hours passed when I was on guard, in the nursery or sitting-room, over Bébé, when her mother was engaged with the requirements of society.

I kept very much in these rooms, fearing to meet Mr. Edgar Mervyn, and avoiding him as much as possible. It would have been strange if my thoughts had not turned to Mr. Willoughby. I heard nothing from Virginia, and Mr. Mervyn's words had—why should I be ashamed to confess it?—left a sting. After all that had passed about those letters it did seem wonderful that he should be what Mr. Mervyn said—Virginia's devoted slave. Then came the question, Why should I disturb myself about it? And I could only get an answer to this question which, only half confessed, made me ashamed and sad.

Lady Mervyn called me one day to her boudoir and said,—

"I must give you some little diversion, Marjorie. I am proposing to spend to-morrow at Windsor, and shall pay my homage to the Queen, who is now residing there, as the King is far from well. Have you been very dull here, my dear?"

"Oh, no, madam! At least, I am never dull when with you, and I have seen so many notable people in the studio—that has been a wonderful delight to me."

"Ah! and that reminds me that Mr. Romney would fain take your portrait when he can find leisure. Mine with Bébé is nearly finished; it gives my husband great pleasure, and he needs some diversion from a pressing anxiety."

I did not then inquire what that anxiety might be. Lady Mervyn went on to say,—

"Sir Melville's son is causing him much uneasiness. But of this I need not speak further. The days are lengthening now, and we shall have a good journey to Windsor, where I propose to stay a night, or it may be two, and do not take dear Bébé, as I go to the inn near the castle, and my sweet lamb might catch cold. I can leave her safely under good Pearson's care, and I feel, Marjorie, it is due to you to give you some little pleasure and variety."

I was enchanted at the idea of seeing Windsor and the King and Queen, for I had heard some of the visitors at Mr. Romney's studio speak of their airing on the terrace, where the public were allowed to stand by and see them pass. I was, therefore, in the highest spirits on this soft February day when I started in the coach with Lady Mervyn, a man and maid on the dicky—the back seat of the coach—and another footman on the box by the side of the coachman.

Everything was a novelty, and everything a keen enjoyment to me. Lady Mervyn was evidently preoccupied, and she never forced conversation. Yet as I caught her beautiful profile as I sat next her I was sure that anxiety—or could it be the parting from Bébé for two days?—was making her sad.

Rooms had been engaged for Lady Mervyn at the

inn, and they were within view of the Round Tower, where the flag was flying.

Lady Mervyn was treated with great respect, and it was evidently considered an honour to receive her. The rooms seemed but poorly furnished for a lady accustomed to the luxury and refinement of Bromley Park, but my dear lady had that sign of perfect breeding which was seen by her sweet and gracious manner to those who served her, whether in an inn or in her own house. Very often, when I hear servants spoken to as if they were of a different order of beings from their masters and mistresses, I remember the lady of Bromley Park, and, as far as in me lies, I have always tried to follow her example.

It was the same in shops. She never turned over many articles without selecting any, and if one was too dear she did not try to cheapen it, as I have known done in Bath by those who had nothing else to occupy them but shopping and bargaining.

The morning after our arrival, just as I was setting out with Lady Mervyn's waiting-woman to see the town of Windsor, two ladies came to the inn and inquired if Lady Mervyn had arrived.

I took upon myself to answer, and the footman was summoned by the inn waiter to conduct the visitors to her ladyship's rooms.

I thought the elder of the two ladies looked somewhat curiously at me, and said something in a low tone to her companion. But I made my curtsy and followed Mrs. Primmer into the courtyard of the inn. She had to make one or two trifling purchases for her lady's toilet at a shop in the principal street, and when that

was done we went up the long flight of steps to the castle.

All first impressions are the most vivid, and as I looked on the verdant meadows lying below the castle, with the river gleaming in the sunshine and the great college of Eton beyond, I could have cried with delight.

We walked round to the further side of the castle to St. George's Chapel, but Mrs. Primmer said she must hasten back, as her lady was to be dressed for the reception at the castle, and the hairdresser was to arrive at twelve.

I had thought before I reached Windsor that all my historical knowledge would start up, and that I should realise kings and queens who had lived within those grey walls, but I did not then think of them, or, indeed, of aught but present enjoyment. I suppose I may say that mine, even in old age, is a buoyant nature. One who was very dear to me used to tell me I was like a cork, always rising on the crest of a wave after being engulfed in depths but a short space before.

I did, I remember, pause at the door of St. George's Chapel, and said to Primmer,—

“Stop one minute! It was here they brought the White King to bury him when the wicked governor would not suffer his body to be brought in for a long time, and forbade the service to be read over him.”

“Dear heart!” Primmer exclaimed, “I don't know who you mean by a White King, and I have no time to loiter. Come on, Miss Mostyn.”

“The White King was His Majesty Charles the First; and while they were waiting the snow fell and covered his coffin. Just think of it, Primmer, and it is not one

hundred and fifty years ago since it happened. You know he was beheaded by order of a set of rebels who had no right to make their King prisoner."

"Well, poor man!" Primmer said, with provoking indifference, "let's hope he was better off dead than alive, for this is a troublesome world for kings as for others. I hear King George is often in a bad way, and frightened at the murder of the French King and Queen. But there, we English people know better than to make away with our kings."

"Now, Primmer, do you forget what I have just told you of Charles the First?"

"Well, well, that's so long ago, though you say only a hundred and many odd years."

We ran quickly down the slope from the castle grounds, and were soon in the town again.

CHAPTER VIII.

GENTLEMEN OF THE ROAD.

WHEN I reached the inn Lady Mervyn's footman said,—

"Her ladyship wishes to see you immediately in the parlour, Miss Mostyn. There's company there," he added, with significance.

I went up the stairs, which showed signs of wear from the passing of many feet, and paused at the parlour door to settle my bonnet, which the wind had blown back, and tuck under it some stray locks of hair.

"Come hither, Marjorie," Lady Mervyn said; "these ladies are desirous to make your acquaintance."

"Nay, something more than acquaintance," the elder lady said—"more than acquaintance, you sweet creature. We are cousins, and I must give you a cousinly embrace."

Rather cautiously, lest she should disturb the folds of her lace kerchief, the lady put her arms round me and said, with a kiss, or rather a succession of light pecks, which did duty for kisses,—

"Your poor mother—lovely Grace D'Eyncourt—made a marriage with your father, Mr. Mostyn. Her family objected; but, poor dear! she would have her own way, and was buried in the little humble Parsonage all her life."

"Where, madam," I said, feeling hot with indignation at hearing my mother and father thus slightly spoken of—"where, madam, my mother was very happy. Love made the little Parsonage a paradise to her—so I have heard our old serving-maid say."

"Listen, Letitia!" the lady exclaimed. "What a dear romantic child she is! Such graceful language, too! Oh! my dear Lady Mervyn, we have found a treasure in Miss Mostyn, our sweet, original little kinswoman. Now, let me carry her off for the rest of the day, as your ladyship is going to present yourself to Her Majesty. How is it, sweet child, you never wrote to me and claimed kinship?"

"When my father died, madam, a letter was found addressed to you, which was duly sent to you, telling you of my orphan and then friendless condition. Of this letter you took no heed."

"It must have miscarried. It cannot have been delivered. I regret it extremely."

The younger lady, Mistress Letitia, murmured something which caught my ear,—

"You know you got the letter and burnt it!"

Did the words reach Mrs. D'Eyncourt's ear as well as mine? Perhaps they did, for she turned sharply round, saying,—

"Time presses, I know, for her ladyship, so we will hasten to take our leave, and I hope, with Lady Mervyn's permission, we may have the pleasure of our sweet cousin's company for the rest of the day."

Lady Mervyn looked at me, with a smile, and said,—

"Marjorie is at liberty to accompany you if she desires to do so. As I shall be absent this afternoon, it

may be a pleasant variety for her. What say you, Marjorie?"

"I will do your bidding, madam, if you think it well for me to accompany these ladies."

"Oh! I will take no refusal. We will depart at once, and I will do my best to make my young kinswoman happy."

So it was a settled point; and I set off with my new relations, who promised to see me safely back in the evening.

Mrs. D'Eyncourt scarcely ever ceased talking, and by way of contrast her daughter Letitia seldom uttered a word. Her mother, it is true, gave her very little chance of getting in a word edgewise.

All the way up the street, to the block of buildings where Mrs. D'Eyncourt lived, she chattered about many things which had no connection with each other.

We met several of her acquaintances, and I was named to them with an aside,—

"My cousin, Marjorie Mostyn;" then, in a lower voice, "poor Grace's child, who made the *mésalliance*."

"Indeed, I am proud to make her acquaintance. Is she paying a visit to you, dear Mrs. D'Eyncourt?"

"Only for the day, I regret to say. She has come to Windsor with Lady Mervyn." Again an aside—"She is her child's governess."

This was a longer colloquy than some others, and Letitia, pulling at my frock, said,—

"Come on with me. My mother will stand and gossip for an hour."

I moved on with Letitia, who seemed quite friendly to me, and I liked her much better than her mother.

At last we reached the house, and I went upstairs with Letitia to the drawing-room, from which there was a good view of the street and of the Round Tower of the castle, where the Royal Standard was waving.

"Windsor is a beautiful place," I said; "it must be charming to live here."

"I hate it; I detest it," was the reply. "It is dulness itself, and those big, heavy walls seem to weigh on me like a nightmare."

"Many men, many minds," I thought; and I wondered how it was that in this world, the horizon of which was now widening to me, so few were really content or happy.

I had believed that Lady Mervyn had nothing to wish for; but lately I had seen a cloud on her lovely face, and in the chariot the day before I had noticed the sadness of her expression, as if the weight of some trouble were upon her.

Mrs. D'Eyncourt came rushing in five minutes after Letitia and I had laid aside our bonnets and cloaks and were ready for dinner.

"I have met so many friends," she said, throwing herself into a chair and summoning her maid to take her cloak and the dainty hood, with its blue lining, which suited her so well.

"I always make a point of being civil, even to bores, of which there are a crop in Windsor; it is good policy, my dear Marjorie, to be polite to everyone, whether well-bred or low-bred."

"We are starving for dinner, ma'am," Letitia said. "It has been announced ten minutes."

We sat down to a small table loaded with delicacies, and of these I was pressed to partake whether I would

or not. My new relation loved show in everything, and all the arrangements contrasted very unfavourably with the stately, well-ordered *ménage* of Bromley Park. It surprised me to hear Mrs. D'Eyncourt lamenting her poverty, and declaring that she only wished she were rich and then she would at once adopt me.

"For, after all, considering your poor dear mother's high rank, it is a thousand pities you should be a governess, even in a family like Lady Mervyn's. She is a little too straitlaced for me and Letitia."

"Not for me," Letitia said. "I wish I saw her ladyship oftener."

"I hear," Mrs. D'Eyncourt said, "that there is great trouble about Sir Melville's son, who is distantly related to us. He loses heavily at cards, and his debts of honour are a fortune in themselves, while the tradesmen go unpaid. It is very different for me, with my straitened income, to have bills running up at the milliner's. I vow I cannot avoid it, and so I tell 'em when they have the impertinence to dun me. It is a misery to be poor, Marjorie. Mind you make a good marriage to a man of breeding and fortune. I married my cousin of the same name—a vast mistake."

"So my father found it," came *sotto voce* from Letitia. As usual, her mother seemed not to hear. She continued to ramble on about things and people of whom I knew nothing. As Mrs. D'Eyncourt spoke so much of low breeding, I wondered she should show what I take to be a sign of it, as was her continual fault-finding with the servant who waited, and of the cooking of the dishes and other little matters.

We had coffee handed in delicate china cups, with

no handles, and Mrs. D'Eyncourt soon took a nap in her chair. Letitia and I watched at the window the chairs and carriages returning from the castle, and as the February twilight deepened, I said I should like to return to the inn.

"Lady Mervyn will send for you, surely. She has enough servants and to spare."

I thought this was likely, and I looked anxiously at the passers-by, hoping to see one of Sir Melville's servants, or, it might be, Primmer, coming for me. But it was getting dark, and no one came. Mrs. D'Eyncourt evidently expected me to take my leave, and I was on the point of asking her to permit her servant to attend me to the inn when, to my infinite surprise, Mr. Edgar Mervyn was announced. He was received with great warmth by Mrs. D'Eyncourt, and she said,—

"Here is a surprise for you. My sweet little cousin, Miss Mostyn, is seated at the window with Letitia. It is quite a reunion of kinsfolk. Letitia, come forward and pay your respects to Mr. Edgar Mervyn. Come, little modest violet in the shade," she went on, addressing me, "do not hide yourself behind Letitia."

The man now came in and lighted the wax candles in the sconces, and I saw Mr. Mervyn coming toward me. He said,—

"I am sent by my stepmother, Miss Mostyn, to attend you to Eton. I have a carriage waiting, and we shall be expected to supper."

"To Eton, sir? Lady Mervyn said nothing of going to Eton."

"Perhaps not; but she has met the lady of the Provost at the castle, who will take no denial, and bids

her to sup and sleep at her house to-night. A happy change, do you not think, from the inn?"

"Is her ladyship still at the inn?" I asked. "I should prefer to return there and travel with her."

"Lady Mervyn is already gone. She bids me say her waiting-woman will pack your wardrobe, and you will find all ready for you at the Provost's house."

"What a charming arrangement, I declare! You are lucky, Marjorie. I doubt not you will meet some fine folks at the Provost's. I declare, I envy you the chance."

I was still doubtful. It seemed scarcely likely that Lady Mervyn should alter her plan so quickly, and I knew she proposed returning to London on the next day.

Mr. Mervyn did not wish to delay, he said, for it was getting late, and Lady Mervyn would be uneasy. So I had to make my adieux to my new-found cousin, and was pecked upon the cheek by Mrs. D'Eyncourt, while Letitia followed me to the head of the stairs and managed to whisper in my ear,—

"Beware of this man, he is a villain!"

With this confirmation of my fears I was handed into a chariot by Mr. Mervyn, who leaped in after me. A man shut the door with a bang, and we were soon rattling down the street at a furious pace. I was terribly frightened, but yet dared not show it. I was near bursting into tears, but, with a great effort, tried to speak civilly to Mr. Mervyn. I did not know how long it would take to get to Eton, but we seemed much longer on the road than what I had heard of the distance from Windsor seemed to warrant.

It grew very dark, and rain fell. We did not seem

to be nearing a town, but were on a heath, and I saw a dark mass of trees, which were part of Windsor Forest. Mr. Mervyn did not say much, but several times he attempted to take my hand and whisper fulsome compliments.

"Are we not nearing Eton, sir?" I asked.

"Not yet, fair Marjorie; the roads are against us."

At last I made a desperate effort, and said as boldly as I could command my voice,—

"I do not believe we are near Eton. I do not believe you, sir, or that Lady Mervyn sent for me under your escort."

"However that may be, sweet Marjorie, you are safe with me—your devoted slave."

"Have you been so cruel, sir, as to tell lies to me?"

"All is fair in love and war, my sweet one. Come, now, be reassured"—for I struggled to open the door—"you cannot escape. Why should you?"

"Why should I? Oh! for pity's sake, sir, let me go."

"You would scarce like to turn out on Ascot Heath, on the edge of a dark forest. Nay; you are safe with me, and I will make you my Lady Mervyn some day."

"I will not stay here. I will call for help."

And with this I thrust my hand through the glass of the carriage window, not heeding the cuts I inflicted on my fingers, and cried out for help. It was in vain. The carriage rolled swiftly on, and in despair I found myself forcibly held down on the seat by Mr. Mervyn, and my heart failed me.

In this moment of distress I recalled what Mr. Whitaker, the parson at Crowhurst, had said to me of God, who is near all that call upon Him in faith. Surely my

feeble cry was heard—the carriage came to a dead standstill. I could hear the horses plunging and struggling to go on. I heard oaths and imprecations from the coachman and the man on the box, and then a face appeared at the broken window and another on the opposite side, and a voice cried,—

“Stand and deliver, or you will be shot through the head!”

“Two can play at that game,” Mr. Mervyn said, taking a pistol from a case in the pocket of the carriage.

“No doubt,” and the man at the window nearest me clicked the pistol and said, “your purse, sir—your purse, or you don’t proceed.”

A fearful struggle was evidently going on at the horses’ heads, and one must have kicked over the traces, for, after much fearful jolting and the report of firearms and volleys of oaths, the chariot was overturned. The door burst open on my side. I scrambled out, and ran, I knew not whither, in the darkness of that awful night.

Even as I tell the story, in the peaceful calm of old age, I can yet be filled with thankfulness as I think of myself, a maiden of tender years, thus, in so wonderful a manner, escaped as a bird from the snare of the fowler.

I scarcely heeded the driving rain and the now pitch darkness as I ran on, only thinking that every step took me further from the place whence I could still hear shouts and cries, and the report now and again of firearms. Darkness favoured me. I saw a white gate just gleaming in the gloom; it was open, and I ran through it, plunging into the forest, only dreading pursuit, and heeding but little the roughness of the way and the

scratches from the branches of underwood. Twice I fell, and twice I regained my footing. My guardian angel must have been sent to watch over me that night, for soon I saw a twinkling light at some distance before me; I made for it, in spite of obstacles, and at last arrived at a cottage, where a lamp was set on the sill of a latticed window. Exhausted and breathless, I had just strength to tap at the door under a porch, and then I sank down, and knew no more till I found myself on a settle by a wood fire, and a woman holding something to my lips in a pewter mug. I put up my hand to take it, and found it was bound up in a cloth.

"My pretty dear," the woman said, "what a plight you are in. Here, drink a sup of broth. I had made it ready for my husband, who is one of the under-keepers of Windsor Forest."

"Keep me safe," I cried; "don't let anyone know I am here. Pray—pray keep me safe."

"That I will; but don't talk, my dear, till you feel better. Your poor little hand is bleeding, and you are covered with mud and brambles sticking to your gown; and, deary me! you've only one shoe."

Footsteps were now heard. I started up in an agony of terror.

"He is coming after me—he will carry me off!" I exclaimed.

"It's my husband, my dear. I know his step amongst a hundred. I always put a light in the casement to guide him home in the dark, and, as luck would have it, it guided you, my pretty."

As she spoke, the good woman put out the lamp and drew the curtain across the lattice.

"If I don't," she said, "the light may guide them whose company we don't want."

The tall figure of the keeper now appeared at the door which opened into the kitchen.

"Well-a-day!" he said. "What's happened? Who have you got here?"

"A poor, stray lamb, Charles, as a wolf is seeking, or I'm mistaken."

The man came up to the settle and looked down on me as I said,—

"Oh, sir! pray keep me safe. Do not let anyone find me. Don't tell anyone I am here if a man comes."

"I'll knock him down, missie, or shoot him dead before he shall touch you."

"You rest quiet, my dear," the keeper's wife said. "Charlie will guard you."

As the giant—for giant he looked in that low-roofed kitchen, his head all but touching the beam across it—laid down his pouch and a brace of pistols, and unfastened a large horn-handled knife from his belt, I thought I must be safe with such a champion.

"There's been a fray this evening," the keeper said.

"Not with poachers!" his wife exclaimed.

"No; with gentlemen of the road, close to the forest. A carriage has been overturned, and one of my woodmen heard cries and the popping of firearms. I tell him he was a coward not to go to the spot and offer help, as it was a woman's voice, poor soul! shrieking, he said, in distress."

"It was my voice, my voice," I said, and then the full horror of those awful moments came back upon me, and I burst into weeping, and clung to the good woman

who had befriended me, and prayed her not to leave me.

How kind she was to me. How she washed my poor, bruised feet, and smoothed my tangled hair, and dressed the cuts on my fingers with tender care. I keep Susan Horne's name in my memory with undying gratitude for her services to me in my forlorn condition.

The keeper, having had his supper, tramped up to bed in the room above the kitchen, and said, as he bade his wife good-night,—

“Pull the bell-string if you hear noises, and I'll be down in a jiffy and deal with anyone who dares to come here with evil intent.”

I lay on the settle, covered with a shawl by Susan Horne, but I could not sleep. If I closed my eyes it was only to open them again, as I listened to every noise, and started up in terror lest my retreat should be discovered. Then, as I went over all that had happened with ceaseless persistence, I thought of Lady Mervyn and what her anxiety would be as to my fate. How could I have been so foolish as to imagine she would have sent Mr. Mervyn for me, when I knew, by much that I had noticed, she had a very poor opinion of her stepson? I blamed myself for my folly, and so passed that long night in self-reproaches and anxiety.

Susan Horne dozed in the large chair by the hearth, waking at intervals to throw a log on the fire, and then she came and looked at me, putting her hand on my forehead, and murmuring over me kind words.

“Try to sleep, my pretty one,” she said. “There's no cure for trouble better than sleep.”

But my eyes would start open, and that listening for

noises, which all sleepless watchers know to be so powerful, kept me wide awake. At last the pallid light of dawn came through the curtain, and the birds began their matins in the trees. A wood-pigeon cooed, and the cock sent forth his clarion, while the hens clucked and rustled in the little yard behind the keeper's cottage. Then, and not till then, comforted by the signs of coming day, and the certainty that my pursuer would now have lost all trace of me, I fell asleep.

CHAPTER IX.

"CALM AFTER STORM DOTH GREATLY PLEASE."

"THE first thing to do," Susan Horne said, "is to let your friends know you are safe. Charlie will find them out if you will give him directions. You talked in your sleep this morning of some Lady—Mervyn, I think, was the name. Is her ladyship your mamma?"

"Oh, no!" I said. "I am an orphan, and live with Lady Mervyn as a governess for her little girl. She is at the inn at Windsor, and there I left her to go to some ladies in the town, while she paid her respects at the castle."

"Dear, what grand folk you belong to! But Charlie will find 'em out, never fear. I'll start him off as soon as he has had his bowl of bread-and-milk and slice of bacon."

"I ought to write a word to Lady Mervyn. Have you got a quill?"

"No, my dear; we don't write here. Charlie tots down a few figures, but I have to put a X for my name."

"I remember," I said; "if you had a quill I couldn't write, my hand aches badly."

"Ah! you'll have to get a surgeon to look at those cuts. I did my best, but I fear me a bit of glass may have got into one of the places."

When the keeper had, as his wife said, broken his fast in the back kitchen, he came to me for orders. These I gave as clearly as in me lay, but the very attempt to do so made my head go round.

"Say, please, Mr. Keeper, that Mr. Mervyn took me away from Mrs. D'Eyncourt's, and the chariot was attacked by highwaymen, and I broke a window to get free, and the carriage was upset, and I got here, and you have been so good to me."

"Begging your pardon, missie," the good keeper said, scratching his head, and twisting one of his huge feet over the other on the sanded floor. "Begging your pardon, I can't remember all them fine names; it puzzles me to think of 'em. I'll just go to the inn and say we've got a young lady here who was run away with by a gentleman."

"Yes, yes, that will do, Charlie. Don't trouble to say more—that will bring the lady here fast enough, depend on't."

"And say it's Marjorie Mostyn."

The keeper shook his head.

"I am no hand at names."

"Or no head, you mean, Charlie; but you'll do your best to get quick to Windsor, and find out this dear little lady's friends—and make haste about it."

The keeper slung his pouch across his shoulder, buckled the leather belt round his waist, out of which the horn handle of the great knife peeped, and bending down to his little comely wife, he gave her a smacking kiss and strode away.

"He has a good heart if he hasn't a head for names and learning. There never was a braver, better man

than my Charlie. We've no children; we never had but one, and she's buried in Brackley Churchyard. Bless her, when I sees the dangers of the young maids, and think of you, missie, treated like this, and, as I suppose, nearly carried off by a villain, I am thankful my Bessie is safe in heaven. She was a winsome child—you call her to mind—and I felt my heart yearn over you last night, and I said to myself my Bessie might have been in a like strait, and now I know she is safe. Charlie and I talk of her sometimes when we sit by the fire in winter, and I am spinning, and he is resting in yonder chair after being on the tramp all the livelong day. Somehow, I feel then as if the child was with us, and grown-up, as she would have been. She was but twelve when she died, six years ago now. Your age she'd have been if she had lived, missie."

"I am only just seventeen," I said.

"Ah, well! I hope you'll get a good husband—for there's nothing better for a woman to have than a good, kind husband, and nothing worse than a bad, wicked one, mind that. When I set the light in the window against Charlie comes home, I think to myself, I wonder what would become of me if the light burned out, and he never came home again—shot by some of those poachers. I think I should die—that my heart would break. It was near breaking when we lost Bessie; but we had got each other left, you know, and it was the same grief to both of us. No, hearts do not break, however sharp is the blow."

In the years to come I remembered the words of the keeper's wife, and knew what it was to have lost the

sharer of grief—as she expressed it so well, *the same grief to both of us.*

Yes, that is the bond of sympathy. Happy are those wives and husbands who are bound together by it in sorrow and in joy.

It was nearly noon before the keeper returned from his errand. No coach could come along the narrow path leading to his cottage, and he said a carriage was waiting for me on the road.

He fumbled in his breast pocket, and produced a letter from Lady Mervyn.

That letter is in the book where my diary tells the events of this year.

Lady Mervyn said,—

“DEAR CHILD,—I have endured great anxiety through the night. I have seen Mrs. D'Eyncourt, whose tidings have shocked and distressed me. I send the chariot to wait for you at a place near the house of the good man who brought the news of you; it is some distance from Windsor by the road. The keeper assures me he will guide you through the forest by a footpath.—From your friend,
ANASTASIA MERVYN.

“P.S.—It would have been wiser had you insisted on returning to the inn to ask for my instructions.”

Yes, it would have been wiser; and yet, how could I think the story Mr. Mervyn told me was a lie from first to last?

It was with a heavy heart that I bade Susan Horne good-bye and, with tears, thanked her for her goodness to me. She kissed me again and again, and bade me

beware of the soft-spoken gentlemen, who were too often "deceiving."

She stood at the little wicket-gate watching me as I walked by the keeper's side, he holding my hand and guiding my footsteps along the narrow path into which I had struggled, through brambles and bracken, from the untrodden part of the forest.

The chariot was waiting for me, and Primmer looked out of the window. She gave me a very different reception from that of dear Susan Horne.

As I stumbled up the steps of the highly-swung chariot she did not attempt to help me, and took no notice of my sore hand, which had been so tenderly bound up by the keeper's kind, motherly wife.

I was choked with tears I tried to repress as the carriage moved off and I saw the last of the keeper's stalwart form, as he stood with his head uncovered, waving his cap, as he called in a loud, resonant tone,—

"A good journey to you, missie, and a safe one."

Primmer began a long tirade as soon as we were fairly started, to the effect that I had nearly killed her lady with fright about me. She hadn't had a wink of sleep all night herself, and she thought I was next door to an idiot to believe Mr. Mervyn's story.

"As if her ladyship would have trusted him to take charge of you. You must have known what a real villain he is. I am almost ashamed to say so, for he will have the title and be master of everyone some day; but I can tell you her ladyship is not best pleased with you, nor with Madame D'Eyncourt either, who knows well enough what Mr. Mervyn is. She has acquaintance with him, for his mother, Sir Melville's first lady, was a sort of

cousin of Mrs. D'Eyncourt. But the long and the short of it is, you were a goose, unless you thought it a fine thing to go off with a gentleman."

This was more than I could bear, and I now seemed to see for the first time that I was supposed to be to blame, that Lady Mervyn's postscript showed it, and that perhaps I had lost her good opinion for ever.

Now, indeed, I could not hide my distress, and I lay back in the corner of the chariot, crying and sobbing with the pain in my hand, and the far worse pain at my heart which Primmer's words gave me. She did not attempt to comfort me, and seemed to harden herself against me. Now and then I heard her say, "As we sow, so we must reap." "Those that listen to flatterers do it to their cost," and so forth.

It was in a miserable plight that I arrived at the inn. I was conscious that many eyes were on me, for, of course, it was known that I had been in a coach which was attacked by highwaymen five miles out of Windsor the evening before, and that they had escaped, while the servant of the gentleman had been shot, and the carriage had been overturned and the panel stove in. I walked feebly and slowly up the wide staircase, and I heard someone whisper,—

"Poor thing, she is in a sorry plight!"

Primmer preceded me, and, opening the sitting-room door, said,—

"Here she is, my lady, more dead than alive!"

I looked beseechingly at the beautiful face I loved so well. It was grave, and almost stern, as Lady Mervyn said,—

"This is a sad affair, Marjorie."

"Oh, madam!"

It was all I could utter.

But I think the distress on my face, and my poor wounded hand touched my lady, for, with a look of divine pity, she said,—

"Poor Marjorie! poor child! Come hither and tell me all."

My tale was told, in spite of the sobs and tears which choked my voice.

"It is a sad story, and affects me deeply. My stepson arrived here while I was absent at the castle, stating that he should return in an hour or two. He seems to have inquired whether you had accompanied me to the castle, and was told by one of my servants that you had left the house before midday with a lady well known in Windsor—Mrs. D'Eyncourt—who is distantly connected with the first Lady Mervyn. What could have tempted my stepson to lay this plan to escape with you I know not. Have you had any reason to be annoyed by his attentions?"

"Yes, madam, several times at Bromley, and the other day in the London house. *I* hated him, and showed it as much as I could."

"You must have thought it strange I should request my stepson to conduct you to Eton, and that I had given you no intimation of that plan."

"I was surprised, madam, but now I deem Mr. Mervyn's story was false. Mrs. D'Eyncourt could not have thought so, or surely she would have warned me."

"It is very unfortunate. At this moment Sir Melville is in great trouble about his son. He has, without his knowledge, sold an estate in Wiltshire, to which, in his

father's lifetime, he had no right, and we hear that he has used the money to pacify some creditors for losses at cards. A messenger arrived from Sir Melville this morning, just before the keeper brought tidings of you, with a distressed letter from my husband, begging me to return at once, for he was greatly troubled; and he says in his letter that his man of business thinks it probable Mr. Mervyn has made for America. What brought him here is a mystery, perhaps solved by his determination to abduct you, and take you as a companion—hardly his wife.”

“Oh, madam!” I exclaimed, “was I in such peril? I did not realise it, though I was greatly frightened as we went on in the darkness, and I felt sure we were not nearing a town. I broke the window and called for help, and then the highwaymen came up. The coach was upset, and I ran away, not knowing whither, till I saw the light in the keeper's cottage.”

“God in His mercy preserved you, Marjorie. Let us thank Him with all our hearts. Now let me see the poor little hand, and we will start for London as soon as possible.”

As might be expected, the news about my flight—as it was called—with Mr. Mervyn had been carried by birds of the air to Mrs. D'Eyncourt. She came flurrying in and talking faster than ever.”

Was it true? Could it be true that Mr. Mervyn had come to her home with a false story? Was she to blame for believing it? With all his faults, Mr. Mervyn was a gentleman, and how could she imagine that he could deceive her and Letitia?

"He didn't deceive me," Letitia said. "I know he is a villain, and I told Miss Mostyn so."

"Will it compromise the sweet child? People's tongues are so busy and so bitter; I am greatly distressed on the sweet child's account."

This was a new light thrown on my adventure by Mrs. D'Eyncourt. It had not occurred to me that I should be, as my cousin said, compromised. Would it be believed that I went willingly with Mr. Mervyn?—that I liked him?—that I was flattered by his attentions? while, if I detested anyone, it was he.

I could not utter a word, but Lady Mervyn, in her calm and decided fashion, said,—

"Marjorie was deceived; and, considering her youth and innocence, it is not extraordinary. My stepson's conduct is disgraceful in the extreme, and no *gentleman* could behave more dishonestly and disgracefully."

"They say one of the highwaymen was shot dead by Mr. Mervyn," Mrs. D'Eyncourt went on. "I vow I shall be in too much terror to get into a coach after dark; the same thing might happen to me. Are you not timid, dear Lady Mervyn, about your journey back to London? It will be dark before you reach Cavendish Square."

"My carriage is well guarded. Sir Melville has sent another servant to-day, I do not doubt well armed, and so are the men in attendance on the chariot."

Mrs. D'Eyncourt was irrepressible. She stayed to the last moment, and did not take any hint as to the inconvenience it was to have her chattering while the servants were getting everything ready for packing in the carriage.

At last we were off. The pain in my hand had lessened by Lady Mervyn's gentle treatment, and, worn out with all I had gone through, I nestled into the corner of the chariot and forgot my troubles in sound sleep.

The chariot drew up at the door in the spring twilight, and I was wakened by a voice I knew well, and was helped out of the carriage by Mr. Willoughby. Lady Mervyn exclaimed, when she saw him,—

"Ah! Roland, I am thankful you have come. Sir Melville will be grateful to you, for the air is thick with trouble."

"I know it, and this has brought me here."

"I must run to my Bébé; I must see how it fares with her, and then I will return. Take Marjorie into the dining-parlour and give her some wine, for she is exhausted after an escape from a great danger."

Mr. Willoughby led me into the parlour, and said, in a distressed tone,—

"You have hurt your hand, Mistress Marjorie. How did that come about?"

"Please do not ask me now. I cannot tell you. Lady Mervyn will tell you." And I remembered what Mrs. D'Eyncourt had suggested as to what might be the opinion of the world—that I was compromised by my enforced flight with Mr. Mervyn. Ah! I thought, if such is the case, what if Mr. Willoughby believes ill of me?

With gentle consideration Mr. Willoughby placed me in an armchair, put a cushion at my back and a stool at my feet. Then he did Lady Mervyn's bidding, and got me wine from the cellaret and some sweet biscuits which were in a dish on the sideboard.

I felt a sudden sense of comfort and security as I looked up at that face, never long absent from my thoughts since that far-off day when I saw Mr. Willoughby first in the hands of the press-men. He would believe no evil of me. I would not trouble myself with the notion.

Mr. Willoughby asked if I had been on the terrace at Windsor, and if I had seen St. George's Chapel.

No; I had been too much hurried to enter the chapel, and Mrs. D'Eyncourt, with whom I had spent the afternoon while my lady was at the castle, was so long over the dinner, and she did not offer to take me out again as I had hoped. "Mrs. D'Eyncourt calls me her cousin," I said. "I wish she didn't. I heard her speaking unkindly of my mother, who was her cousin, saying she had made a *mésalliance* by marrying my father. It is not true; my father's family was as good as the D'Eyncourts, and there never was a wife happier than my mother—so Tilly says."

"And who is Tilly?" he asked, with a smile.

"My dear old nurse, who yet lives at the Vicarage with the new vicar."

"Ah! I have heard of him as a Methodist. He seems to have reclaimed a good many ill-conducted people in the district by his fervour and zeal. Far be it from me to condemn such men, though I may wish their zeal was oftener tempered with wisdom."

"You have been to Bath, sir," I said. "Can you give me news of Virginia Beauchamp. I fear she cannot yet use her pen, or I should have had a letter from her."

"Miss Beauchamp is better, and the waters have

been very beneficial to her. She has taken the baths regularly. They have not, I regret to say, effected much for Mr. Beauchamp. I find him a good scholar, and with a fine literary taste."

"He is very fond of Virginia," I said.

"And justly; she is very charming, and has a gift for conversation. There was often a little coterie formed round her chair in the Pump-room, where Mrs. Beauchamp is amongst the gayest of the gay and is known as an accomplished whist player."

"It must be a very gay life," I said, and his words in praise of Virginia's gifts gave me a little pang of jealousy. I felt then that I was only the parson's daughter, and that I should never draw around me a "coterie" of admirers as Virginia did.

This half-hour with Mr. Willoughby passed only too quickly, and then Barbara's nurse came to take me to our rooms at the top of the house, where Bébé was, she said, "wearying and longing" to see me again.

I found Bébé's delight at my return very sweet to me, and she sat on a stool at my feet, with her head against my knee, very much like the attitude in which Mr. Romney painted her portrait in his picture of her beautiful mother. How much we owe to the power of a true artist to impress on the canvas the forms and features so dear to us in the years that are past. Time and sorrow cannot touch the Bébé in Mr. Romney's portrait, nor age dim the lustre of her mother's beauty. They remain idealised, it may be, by the genius of the master's hand, but true and loving representations of those who have lain in their quiet graves for many years. Sweet Bébé! with her wistful dark eyes and her caress-

ing ways, I love to think of her as she nestled in her mother's arms that day when Mr. Romney, arrested at the door of his studio, exclaimed, "Stay as you are, madam; do not move," and proceeded to make the outline of that charming picture; a representation of mother and child worthy to live with the immortal Madonnas of Raphael.

CHAPTER X.

AT BATH.

1795. I SAW with pain that Lady Mervyn was weighted with anxiety. Mr. Willoughby was continually closeted with her and Sir Melville, and I spent my time mostly with Bébé; and but few people came to the house, or if they came Lady Mervyn did not receive them.

To my great amazement, a note was handed to me one morning from Mr. Romney, asking me to do him the honour to sit for my portrait. I ran with the note in my hand to Lady Mervyn's boudoir, but when I tapped at the door Mr. Willoughby opened it.

"Lady Mervyn is much engaged at this moment. Can I convey a message to her?"

He closed the door behind him as he spoke, and said,—

"Let us come into the drawing-room, and you will then speak with more freedom."

I think he saw I was excited about the note I held in my hand, and said, in the kind voice which was ever music in my ears, "Have you any news to disturb you?"

I laughed now, and replied,—

"It is only that I am surprised that Mr. Romney should ask me to sit for my portrait—a great artist

like him, who is the favourite painter of so many beautiful ladies."

"I am not surprised," Mr. Willoughby said. "I daresay Mr. Romney wants to make a study of you, and—" He stopped.

He was ever free from the habit of offering fulsome flatteries, which were then the ordinary form in which gentlemen of the world addressed women, gentle or simple.

"It will do me and many another a favour if Mr. Romney is successful in transferring what we see and admire to canvas."

How could I be otherwise than pleased at the compliment coming from one who was chary, as a rule, of offering one?

My voice trembled with the emotion his words called forth, as I said,—

"Will Lady Mervyn approve my sitting to Mr. Romney?"

"I am sure of it. It is a cause of sorrow to Lady Mervyn that she is so much occupied with very disastrous matters that she can see so little of you or her child. The man who behaved in that cowardly and disgraceful manner to you has gone near to ruin his father. It seems doubtful if Sir Melville will return to Bromley Park for some time. Edgar Mervyn is steeped in debt—debts of dishonour—and he has not only sold a part of the estate without his father's knowledge, but he has forged a document to obtain money, which would make him liable to the heavy penalty of the law were his poor father not anxious to hush the matter up. He has left the country, we believe, and has taken money

with him. I shudder when I think of what you escaped, Mistress Marjorie, for, doubtless, villain that he is, he intended to make you a companion in his flight."

"To marry me, sir? Can you mean that? I would have killed myself rather than have consented."

"Ah! dear Mistress Marjorie," Mr. Willoughby said, "we will not speak more of what, by God's mercy, you were delivered from. Let the deeds and intentions of the scoundrel pass from remembrance; and I devoutly trust he may not set foot in England again for a long time. The lawyers have made an appointment for noon to-day, and when the consultation is over Lady Mervyn will let you know the result."

"I am so sorry, sir," I said, "so distressed for my lady, who is as good as she is beautiful, and has been so kind and sweet to me."

"And to all who have the honour of her friendship," Mr. Willoughby said. "Now, go to Mr. Romney's studio, and let him set about the picture with all speed. I must return to my uncle, who needs all the aid I can render him."

We were leaving the room when Mr. Willoughby said,—

"Have you heard aught of Miss Virginia Beauchamp of late?"

"No, sir. I fancy it is out of sight out of mind with her."

Mr. Willoughby laughed.

"I was in Bath soon after her arrival there. She was even then amusing many shallow pates with her sharp sayings. I was in Bath but two days—one soon tires of the round of Pump-room gaieties."

I remembered what Mr. Mervyn had said, but now I felt no word of his could be relied on.

"It seems to me that Mistress Virginia is not likely to write me any such letters as those about which I confided in you; her attentions are transferred elsewhere."

"I am glad to know it is so."

Again Mr. Willoughby seemed about to speak, but suddenly turned away and left me with Mr. Romney's note in my hand, with a strange flutter of joy at my heart. If it could be possible that he loved me, would there be a happier woman in the wide world than me, Marjorie Mostyn, the parson's daughter?

We were so near Mr. Romney's house in Cavendish Square that when I had fetched my hood and cloak I went myself, with my answer in my hand. The servant, who knew me, ushered me into the studio at once, and I found Mr. Romney alone.

"So you are come, you little witch. I have a spare hour, and we will begin forthwith. Take off your hood and sit down. So!"

"I did not think, sir, you would begin to paint to-day. I have only a plain kerchief on my neck, and I think my hair wants dressing."

"Not a bit of it; it is just as I like it—full of ripples and curls. Don't touch it! don't touch it! Leave that little tendril as it is over your cheek. But now, look as you did when you had that child of Lady Mervyn's at your feet, when you were smiling at her antics with a kitten. Come, come; look down a little, not too much. Now, let us talk of pleasant things. You have been to Windsor to see the Queen—eh?"

The very name of Windsor brought back to me anything but pleasant memories, and then Mr. Romney said,—

“What has happened to your little hand that it is bound up?”

“It was cut, sir—cut by glass.”

“Dear! dear! Well, I shall not paint your hand—certainly not to-day; so that is no matter.”

I suppose my smile vanished as I thought of all that terrible time, and Mr. Romney said—

“This won't do. You have changed from a Hebe to a Niobe. See here, bring the child in to-morrow, kitten and all, and while you watch her and talk to her I'll catch you as I desire. I am afraid,” Mr. Romney said, “my Lady Mervyn is indisposed. I have not seen her for some days; nor has Sir Melville come in to look at the picture.”

Mr. Romney turned an easel on which the portrait of mother and child rested.

“I scarce know how to part with a picture like this,” he said. “I grew to love it as a man may love the work of his hands when it satisfies him—in part—in part; the ideal is never really reached. But this is near, yes, near what I would fain achieve. The child's eyes! What eyes they are! And then the tenderness which the mother's reposeful clasp expresses, which the child's attitude seems to appreciate. There is a sense of safety, too, as well as love, seen in Bébé's nestling against her mother. And, by Heaven, what a mother! A perfect head and neck, and what a voice!”

As I stood looking at the picture, Mr. Romney seized

his crayon, turned another easel towards him, and, with a few swift touches, said,—

“There, that will do for to-day. Come on the morrow, and bring the child and the kitten.”

After six days’ sitting, with Bébé amusing herself, and Pearson on the watch with her needlework, my portrait grew on the canvas, and Mr. Romney was satisfied.

Bébé delighted him with her praise.

“Marjy! Marjy!” she cried. “Pretty! pretty!”

“Yes, you are right, little one, it is pretty, *piquante*, fascinating. There! if I say more I shall make you vain; and, mark you, Mistress Marjorie, if you are ever vain this picture would not resemble you, and the charm of your face would be lost. Do I not see dozens of fine ladies, who come and pose and preen their feathers, like so many pouter pigeons, and put their heads on one side, and play off airs, hoping to hear me offer some pretty compliments; and all the time I am saying to myself, ‘Be natural, madam; forget yourself. Be natural, or I shall despair of making your portrait.’”

This was our last week in London, this week of my sitting to Mr. Romney. He had worked so well at the picture that it was finished, and I wondered what would be done with it. I knew he was paid many golden guineas for Lady Mervyn’s; and who was to pay for mine?

I thought when I bade adieu to Mr. Romney that he was a little mysterious about the fate of the picture, and I did not like to ask any questions.

“You will see it again some day, Mistress Marjorie,” he said. “I keep it for the present, as I often do retain my work to show visitors to my studio. Then, with a

twinkle in his eye, he said,—“This portrait of the parson's daughter will be set store by, or I'm mistaken.”

We did not return to Bromley Park, but took up our abode at Bath on Queen's Parade.

Lady Mervyn had not confided much to me, but I gathered that Sir Melville dreaded a return to his home, where every tenant on his estate would know of his son's disgrace.

“Roland Willoughby will be at his place near by,” she said, “and will manage matters for the present, with the help of our trusty steward. As time goes on Sir Melville will feel the pain of his son's treachery less, and we shall return to our sweet home in peace. Meantime, the Bath waters will be beneficial to Sir Melville for his gout; and for myself I do not doubt I shall meet some friends with whom I can have some pleasant intercourse. We must find out Mr. and Mrs. Beauchamp, and poor Virginia.”

On the second day after our arrival in Bath I had my first sight of the gay crowd in the Pump-room. For the first time I heard the chatter of the belles, and saw the beaux ambling round them in attendance. Fans fluttered, and the jewels on the ladies' high coiffures sparkled, and I looked on, outside the gay throng, feeling very shy and rather sad, as I stood behind Lady Mervyn's chair, and seeing many strange faces passing to and fro. I had expected to see Virginia and her mother in the crowd, and remembered what had been said of Virginia having admirers round her, listening to her sharp repartees and saucy speeches.

To my surprise, I was tapped on the shoulder by a

fan from behind, and I heard a voice associated with that most terrible evening of my life at Windsor, saying,—

“To think of meeting my sweet cousin here, and dear Lady Mervyn. This is a delight. Letitia, come and congratulate yourself on this charming reunion. There! I will sit by her ladyship, and you shall take our fair little cousin round the rooms and point out celebrities to her. Why,” Mrs. D'Eyncourt continued, “you are a little heroine of romance. I heard of the flight, and—”

“Pardon me, madam,” Lady Mervyn interposed, “that is a forbidden subject, and,” she added, “a very painful one.”

“Oh! I beg ten thousand pardons, my lady. I did not know I was treading on dangerous ground.”

“You ought to have known it, mamma,” Letitia said. “Come away with me, Marjorie, into a quiet corner. You don't know how I abhor all the amazing nonsense which is talked here. We only arrived in Bath four days ago, and my mother is trying to get introductions to the grandest folk, and it isn't so easy.”

We got to the quiet corner of a small ante-room, leading out of the Pump-room, and here I found the very person I sought—Virginia herself! with several smart beaux round her, exactly as I had heard would be the case. Virginia did not give me the warm greeting I expected. She broke off in a speech, which had evidently entertained her hearers, to say,—

“Why, I vow, here is the parson's daughter. Have you fallen from the skies, child, or come on wings, like the good angel you are? Take that chair, or—Mr. Bousfield, why don't you rise at once and offer a seat on

that bench to my friend and," with an inquiring and not a flattering glance at Letitia, "*her* friend?"

Mr. Bousfield started to his feet and made a profound bow, with apologies for seeming discourtesy, saying,—

"We were so enthralled by Miss Beauchamp's brilliant sallies we forgot our manners, I fear. What say you, Arthur?"

This was addressed to another gentleman, who did not seem to share Mr. Bousfield's enthusiasm for Virginia, and hardly repressing a yawn, bowed, and lounged away, saying in a drawling tone,—

"Adieu! I have some letters awaiting me at my lodgings which demand attention."

"A nice excuse," Virginia said; "but there is an old proverb about some people's room being more to be desired than their company."

Mr. Bousfield was evidently anxious to keep on good terms with the man he called Arthur, and saying to Virginia, "We shall meet again at Wiltshire's rooms later," he also, with a sweeping bow, took his departure.

"The poor moths," a severe-looking lady, who was near us, said, "they'll be burning their wings at the candle again ere long."

"Well-a-day! I cannot help that. They may scorch and welcome. Now, Marjorie, let me hear your news."

"I would sooner first hear yours," I said. "I am glad to see you able to move about, and I hope you have full use of your hands, though you have never penned one line to me since we parted."

"My dear, I have the full use of my tongue and my brains. My hands are a bit stiff, and I walk with a

stick, but that is interesting, you know. I have plenty to amuse me here. It is a blessing my father is like to remain at Bath. It is a brighter life than one can lead at old humdrum Bradford."

"How does Mr. Beauchamp do?" I asked.

"Not any better, my dear. He is dragged out for his bath, and made to swallow gallons of water, but he is much about the same."

"And Mrs. Beauchamp—how is she?" I inquired.

"Taken up with the chapel in the Vineyards, and has a religious fit on her. Wants me to catch it, but I am not a good subject. Perhaps you think there is wine at the Vineyards; but no, only a chapel founded by the Countess of Huntingdon, and there the great world resort and sit in state, while a man they all worship harangues and tells them unless they are converted they will go, when they die, to a very hot place. Being converted means giving up balls and theatres, which are the wickedest places of all."

From time to time I looked at Letitia D'Eyncourt's face, and saw that she listened to Virginia's tittle-tattle with scornful amusement, and she now spoke for the first time.

"I have been to the chapel in the Vineyards, and I heard much there preferable to the folly I have to listen to in the Pump-room."

Instead of being offended, Virginia laughed and said,—

"The great Mrs. Siddons is going to act for a few nights in Bristol, and I am determined to get there. She would be indeed more worth listening to than the fools who chatter here. Myself included—eh, Miss D'Eyncourt?"

Letitia rose then, and making a curtsy to Virginia, left us to rejoin her mother.

"Well, now she is gone, we will talk on more private matters. You know Mr. Roland Willoughby was here, and he has quite forgiven me. He is called a milksop by these fine gentlemen, and laughed at because he does not season his talk with oaths, never drinks, never slanders anybody, and if a scandalous story is told in his presence he marches off and will not listen to it. All this makes me feel he is too good for me, and since he has shown pretty plainly that he thinks so, I have turned my attention in other directions. My chair is ordered for twelve o'clock. Come to our house with me and see my father."

"I must not leave Lady Mervyn," I replied, "without an apology, and I have promised to take Barbara for an airing. But I will gladly pay my respects to Mr. and Mrs. Beauchamp at some future time."

"Well, give me your arm, and with my stick I can get to the outer hall, where the lacqueys wait for their ladies. But I have not had half enough news from you. There is a rumour that a little beauty, called the Parson's Daughter, ran away with a gallant gentleman, who proposed that she should accompany him across the Atlantic Ocean. Oh, fie! little demure Marjorie! But it is a mercy you were stopped; for that gay Lothario has not much character to lose; and soft-spoken and handsome as he is, he is a somewhat dangerous person to have aught to do with."

What could Virginia mean? Was this a specimen of the scandalous stories she said were current at Bath? She had put her hand in my arm, and leaning on it and

on the stick on the other, she was preparing to cross the large Pump-room when I said,—

“Wait one minute, Virginia. Is it possible that you can believe what you have just said about me?”

“My dear, no one would think the worse of you if it is believed. Runaway matches are the fashion; but you have had an escape. It is said the carriage was stopped by highwaymen and upset, and my gallant gentleman left you to fight for yourself, and made off, like the coward he is.”

The colour put upon this story of my drive from Windsor filled me with distress and anger. Could it be possible that Mr. Willoughby had heard it and, oh, terrible thought! believed this version of what happened? No, it was *not* possible; but even at this distance of time my heart swells with indignation as I remember how this false statement about one of the most dreadful experiences of my life was reported to me by Virginia Beauchamp. Tears, hot tears, sprang to my eyes, and I said,—

“I think I must leave you and join Lady Mervyn. Some of your new friends will doubtless help you to reach the hall. But let me say, once for all, for the sake of old friendship you might have spared me the pain of hearing a story about myself which is a lie from beginning to end.”

“Now, do not be foolish, sweet little Marjorie! Let folks gossip, and never show you care a fig about it. No,” she said, holding my arm in a tight grasp, “no, I will not let you leave me. I love to see you again, and I like you fifty times better than anyone else in the world, except my poor father.”

It was always thus with Virginia. It was scarcely possible to make her seriously angry, and she never bore any grudge for long against those who had offended her. Perhaps it was that nothing struck very deep with her—joy or sorrow, slight or kindness, flattery or condemnation of her conduct.

Some natures are like the surface of beautiful marble—very fair and smooth, and on whom the waters of affliction and the sunbeams of happiness leave no lasting impression.

I was surprised to see how gaily Virginia went up to Lady Mervyn, who was sitting by Sir Melville as he sipped his third glass of water.

"See, my lady," she said, "how well I have recovered since the days when I lay a helpless log, and owed so much to your kindness at Bromley Park."

"My dear Miss Beauchamp," Lady Mervyn replied, with the sweet graciousness which, however sad she might feel, never left her, "I am rejoiced indeed to see you able to walk."

"Hobble, your ladyship, is the better word," Virginia said, laughing. "But I am glad to have the kind arm of the dear little Marjorie to lean on, and it is delightful to have the chance of her companionship again. I do not forget how peevish I often was to her when I was lying in your mansion. I trust, sir," Virginia went on, addressing Sir Melville, "these waters may be of benefit to you. I cannot say they have wrought all the good we wished on my father."

There was a further exchange of compliments, and then, with a bright smile, Virginia, seeing her servant

was in waiting, beckoned him to her assistance, and I was free from her clinging grasp on my arm.

"You will be with us to-morrow," Virginia said, "if agreeable to Lady Mervyn."

"Most certainly. I shall be pleased for Marjorie to pay her respects to Mr. and Mrs. Beauchamp, as I hope to do. I will bring her to your house and leave her for a few hours."

"Virginia is the same as she ever was," I said, when she was gone.

"Yes. No one would imagine she had gone through such a trial and been a prisoner to her couch for so long. I wonder a little her mother permits her to be unattended in the Pump-room, where so many idle people congregate."

"Virginia says her mother is now a worshipper at the Vineyards, and holds all gaieties in abhorrence."

"Ah! I know the Countess of Huntingdon has many followers in Bath, and the *haut ton* frequents the chapel. The peculiar doctrines she holds do not commend themselves to me; but there is room for all diversity of opinion, and the countess is a really good woman. Mrs. D'Eyncourt was proposing to take you to Bristol with her to see the celebrated Mrs. Siddons act. I am quite willing to allow you to go if you please. I had intended taking you to see her at Drury Lane, but these troubles arose, and I had not heart for anything. I believe Roland Willoughby proposes to accompany the party; but, doubtless, arrangements will be made. I feel," Lady Mervyn continued, "that I desire nothing but a quiet retirement with my darling Béb  and her father. To console him is now my chief aim and desire. It is sad

indeed that the son who should be the staff of his old age should pierce him with many sorrows. I can be thankful God has not given me a son, though, when my Bébé was born, I felt it to be a disappointment not to be the mother of a boy."

Bébé had entwined herself round my heart, and I never knew a child so full of sweetness and intelligence. She loved to hear stories, and made progress with her own reading. Lady Mervyn left her to my charge, and when she was not with her mother she was with me. Attended by Pearson, we walked about Bath, and often extended our excursions outside the city to one of the heights above it, whence a view could be obtained of the queen of cities, her terraces and fine houses; the Abbey, old and grey, standing up as an expression of the genius of the builders of an olden time. I have seen many cities in England and on the Continent since those days, and I still think Bath stands without a rival.

CHAPTER XI.

MY FIRST PLAY.

It was a change indeed to find Mrs. Beauchamp quoting texts of Scripture, and maintaining a silent, not to say stern, demeanour.

We are always prone to think that any particular form of religion changes natural temperament when it is adopted. Surely this is a mistake. Natural temperament lends itself to the adoption of certain forms of faith; but these forms do not create it. Just as emotional and romantic people delight in ornaments and excessive ritual in worship, so do sterner characters find the extreme doctrines of Calvin, and what we have been accustomed to call Puritanism, in harmony with their tastes and prejudices.

I will not say it was not better for Mrs. Beauchamp to leave her invalid husband for prayer meetings and the hearing of long sermons preached by the popular divine at the Vineyards than to go the round of balls and card-parties, which were the amusements of those who frequented Bath in those days. But I noticed that she was less, rather than more, loving and attentive to Mr. Beauchamp, and left Virginia to do very much as she pleased.

The part of a self-contained and self-important nature had not melted under the teaching at the Vineyards.

Always self-assertive, Mrs. Beauchamp now looked down, as from a vantage ground, on all whom she considered unconverted, and her personal salvation engrossed her to the shutting out of the love for all the children of our Heavenly Father's family, irrespective of creed or position—children of one great family, as that hymn of Mr. Wesley's so beautifully sets forth.

If Mrs. Beauchamp's greeting to me was cold and without a smile, Mr. Beauchamp's was more than genial. He was much changed, much more feeble, and his tall and once athletic frame shrunk and emaciated. When I saw him he had just been brought home from the morning bath in his chair, and was evidently very tired and exhausted.

"I want to be left alone, little Marjorie," he said. "Why drag a dying man to the baths? Why deluge him with nauseous water? My wife means well, poor soul; but what with preaching and tracts, and a face like a sphinx, she has forgotten how to smile, I think, and threatens me with— Well, that is enough; too much, maybe. Tell me how you find Virginia."

"Wonderfully improved."

"In bodily power, you mean?"

"Yes, sir. Remember I left her tied to her couch, and forbidden to move."

"She is wild to go to Bristol and see Mrs. Siddons as Lady Macbeth. Those relatives of yours, I hear, are making up a party to fill a box at Bristol. Mrs. Siddons was the idol of Bath some years ago. I saw her then, and fell under the spell of her splendid beauty—and it *was* marvellous beauty. Now she is the Tragedy Queen; and I may be wrong, but for me, from what I hear, she

would have less charm and less power than when she was younger and sent me into a fit of sobs by her Jane Shore, as she said, 'Forgive me; oh! forgive me,' when asking pardon of her husband. Also the 'Mourning Bride' deeply touched me. She had a benefit before she took farewell of Bath, and one hundred and forty-six pounds were the result. The Duchess of Devonshire and crowds of fine folks hung on her lips, and Dr. Whalley, who wrote a long rigmarole called 'Edwy and Edilda,' worships still at the actress's shrine. Have you ever seen a play, little Marjorie?"

"Never, sir;" and then I added, laughing, "Virginia is the only actress I have seen."

"Ah! the saucy wench can still bring down the house. Which house consists of her cranky old father and an old friend who looks in on me at times. She has a gift, dear child, and a face full of expression. I am afraid a good many empty-headed fools hang about her chair on the Parade, or in the Pump-room. She goes to the cotillon parties, too—only as a spectator, she says. It is a trouble to me, shut up here, that her mother, eschewing all vanities, lets Virginia have her full swing. Now these friends of yours, the D'Eyncourts, have taken her up, I am glad to say. The mother is younger than the daughter, I hear, and prances and frisks about as if she were sweet and twenty, while her daughter looks on and frowns."

It was a very just description of Mrs. D'Eyncourt and Letitia, and I said, "Mrs. D'Eyncourt is a person who will never grow old."

"*Look* old, you mean, little Marjorie. Grow old she must; but a little powder, a little rouge and a judicious

wig go a long way towards making fifty *look* like fifteen, or seventy like seventeen. But the day must come when the truth comes out; and the painted and be-wigged belle, stripped of her finery, is a very deceitful old woman indeed. This is moralising," Mr. Beauchamp said, "to a little lady whose roses are her own and whose head has no need of a wig, nor eyebrows of dark lines to set off the lustre of her eyes!"

The party formed for the expedition to Bristol theatre consisted of the D'Eyncourts, Virginia, one of her admirers, with whom she kept up a ceaseless banter, and myself.

We had a post-chaise, and started one bright morning for Bristol. Mrs. Beauchamp bade us a solemn good-bye, and said she trusted we should find at last how the vanities of the world were as dust and ashes when weighed against the service of God.

"You are going without my blessing, Virginia, and I look upon this as a very serious matter."

"But, ma'am, please to remember my father blesses me, and is expecting a rare treat when I come home and rehearse the play for his benefit. Nay, mother, do not look so solemn; give me a kiss. I remember there was a time, not so long ago, when you went to theatres and footed it with the gayest at balls—the admired of all admirers."

"I have seen the folly and sinfulness of my past life, Virginia," Mrs. Beauchamp said, "and I pray that you may soon have your eyes opened, as mine have been, lest another judgment come upon you."

"I sha'n't be pitched head foremost from a frisky horse again, if that is what you mean. Good-day,

mother! and pleasant dreams to you to-night while I am seeing and hearing Mrs. Siddons."

We had all been waiting in the parlour of the house in Queen's Parade while the luggage was being stowed away in the chaise.

Mrs. D'Eyncourt brought several large packages, and her man and maid were to sit on the back seat—known as the dicky—of a post-chaise.

Virginia still walked with difficulty, and Mr. Vernon, her admirer, assisted her into the carriage. We followed, and were soon rattling out of Bath on the Bristol Road.

We put up at an inn in the Hot Wells, where Mrs. D'Eyncourt made much ado as to the size of the rooms, and, in fact, from first to last did nothing but grumble. She was in a very cross-grained mood, and vented her ill-temper on her servants and the people of the inn with the bad grace which I must call under-bred.

The contrast between Mrs. D'Eyncourt's behaviour and dear Lady Mervyn's struck me more forcibly than ever. Sweet and gracious in her manner to her equals in rank, Lady Mervyn was always kind and gentle to her servants, and I never heard her speak in a loud, commanding voice when she gave an order. No one ever took a liberty with Lady Mervyn; no one ever forgot to be respectful to her; while Mrs. D'Eyncourt's man and maid spoke to her in a very unbecoming manner.

When we first got into our box at the theatre, I was taken up with the sight of the crowded pit and the dress of the ladies in the audience. Many must have been the wives of Bristol citizens, and the jostling and pushing, the squeezing of gowns, in some cases, the tottering and final fall of high head-dresses amused us. The wig

of one fine lady actually came off, the riband of her turban being caught in the hook of another woman's bodice, and tearing both off together.

Virginia went into fits of laughter, so did Mrs. D'Eyncourt. Then Letitia said in her strange, low voice,—

“You wouldn't laugh, mamma, if you lost your wig.”

Mrs. D'Eyncourt's laughter ceased, and she turned upon her daughter with a sharp reprimand. This, like all others that I had heard, made no visible impression. We had to be in our places early, for the crowd outside the theatre was increasing every minute. Clamour for admission when the house was declared to be full reached us, and Mr. Vernon expected a riot, for he said,—

“The Bristol people are rough folks to deal with, and by no means law-abiding. They threw rotten eggs at Mr. Burke.”

Our party chatted till the curtain drew up, and then all eyes were directed to the stage, and all tongues hushed into silence.

As for myself, I may say that in the two hours which followed I was kept in a state of nervous excitement which has never been repeated, though I have seen many plays and many good actors since that memorable evening.

I lost myself—my own identity—as I saw that tragedy rehearsed before my eyes by the greatest actress of the age, or, I might say, of any age. I lived it over in fancy many times. I quailed under the power it possessed, and for many weeks I dreamed I heard again that despairing cry of remorse, as the murderess tried in vain to wash out the signs of her guilt!

How beautiful she was when she came down to the

door of the castle to meet the King, with the false words of kindly welcome on her tongue. How queenly and graceful was her step as she moved in her long black robe in the first act, with its border of vivid red, and long white veil. How every movement told, and how her lovely hands, with their gestures, were in harmony with every word she uttered.

Murmurs and rapturous applause rang through the house, in which Virginia and Mrs. D'Eyncourt joined; but I was dumb and motionless. I remember now the tension of every nerve; the sense of being in the presence of a genius—a woman who made real for me the flights of an unholy ambition; the yielding to the lust for power; and then the remorse—the agony of remorse—that killed her.

When Mrs. Siddons appeared at last in the white drapery designed, as I heard them say afterwards, by the great Sir Joshua Reynolds, her pale dream-face of woeful remorse seen from the clouds of snow-white drapery, I could no longer refrain myself, and cried,—

“It breaks my heart to see you thus.”

“Hush!” Mr. Vernon said sharply; and Mrs. D'Eyncourt muttered, “Have you never seen a play before?”

It was not a play to me. It was so real, so terribly real, that I forgot everything but the sin, the shame and remorse of the woman who had so stained and soiled her womanhood by this awful deed. Everyone has read of the characteristics of this actress's genius. I need not dwell on them here. I have only to tell of the power which she possessed over me, so that it seemed almost profanation, when, as the tumults of applause died away,

and Mrs. Siddons had come before the curtain to hear the plaudits of the crowd, Mrs. D'Eyncourt said,—

“I scarcely liked that black gown she wore; and when I saw her at Drury Lane she had a more becoming costume.”

“Come, child,” she said to me, “wake up, or folks will think you are a sleep-walker, like Lady Macbeth!”

The words were accompanied by a sharp tap of her fan, and I tottered to my feet and was glad of Letitia's arm to support me. Letitia was indeed very good to me, and I have never forgotten it. A sharp altercation soon followed between Mrs. D'Eyncourt and Virginia.

“You cannot—you must not go to the Green-room,” she said.

“I shall do as I choose. Mr. Vernon will take me, and Marjorie always does as I tell her.”

“It will be a very forward proceeding. You are under my chaperonage, Miss Beauchamp, and I cannot permit you to intrude upon Mrs. Siddons.”

We were now in the lobby of the theatre, and crowds were at the door, hoping to see the great lady come out to her chair. There was an uproar—link-boys shouting, the chairmen swearing, and a scene of pushing and fighting, such as I had never seen before. Our chairs were in waiting; and I would gladly have got into mine at once, but Virginia now seized my arm and, lame as she was, dragged me back to the passage which she believed led to the Green-room. How the combat might have ended I do not know, had not a man pushed his way to the door of the theatre and cried, in stentorian tones,—

“Clear off! Move on! If you are waiting to see

Mrs. Siddons, you may wait till Doomsday, for she has made her exit, by the back entrance, to her lodgings."

A groan of disappointment ran through the crowd, and Virginia, feeling the fulfilment of her wishes hopeless, allowed Mr. Vernon to take us to our chairs and release me from her grasp.

"Baffled, for this time," Virginia said. "But I shall get my way in spite of all the folly old harridans may talk."

As might be supposed, Mrs. D'Eyncourt was in no very serene temper.

As the chairs swung off, the men taking a very devious course, owing, doubtless, to potations at the tavern near the theatre, I had much difficulty in keeping my seat, and my chair was continually charging into Letitia's on one side, and Mrs. D'Eyncourt's on the other.

"I was not aware what a vixen Miss Beauchamp could be, or I never would have undertaken to be her chaperon. I marvel, Marjorie, you can be friendly to her. She is a bag of conceit, and sets herself up as a wit and reciter of poems and plays. For my part, I don't think her clever; it's all outside show, with nought beneath." Then, with a prolonged yawn, "I think 'Macbeth' is too long a play, and Mrs. Siddons is overrated."

"Oh!" I exclaimed, "is that possible, ma'am?"

"Quite possible, miss, and I will thank you not to contradict me."

"Marjorie did not contradict you, mamma," Letitia said; "she only asked a question."

"I'd like to ask her one," Mrs. D'Eyncourt replied. "What made her run off with Sir Mervyn Melville's son—his black sheep, as everyone knows now?"

Letitia squeezed me tight, and whispered,—

“Take no heed of my mother. She is only put out and tired.”

But the words pierced me with a sharp pang. If Mrs. D'Eyncourt really believed I ran off with Mr. Mervyn, other people might believe the same, and I had hoped that terrible night might have been forgotten.

“Do not say a word,” Letitia whispered, as I began to speak in self-defence. “Be quiet. I always leave mamma when she is like this.”

This conversation passed when we were at last safely landed at the inn. I say landed, for, indeed, it was like the rolling of a ship to ride in a chair borne by men who were unsteady from drink.

I went to bed, but not to sleep. My brain was too busy rehearsing all the scenes of that wonderful play. If I did drop asleep for a few minutes, I woke up crying out, “Out, out, damned spot!” and trembling in every limb and panting for breath.

Virginia, who shared my room, slept well, and had to be roused by the maid in the morning to sip a cup of chocolate which she brought her.

Our ride back to Bath was not a very pleasant one. Mr. Vernon had announced his intention of staying for another night to see the great actress in “The Fatal Marriage.” But Mrs. D'Eyncourt was obdurate; she had had enough for once, and then there was a ball at Wiltshire's rooms that evening, which she did not mean to miss for twenty Mrs. Siddons.

Virginia failed to get her own way this time. Mrs. D'Eyncourt was too much for her, and so she was

obliged to give in, as it was impossible for her to remain in Bristol without a chaperon.

That evening in the Bristol theatre marks an era in my life. I think everyone who looks back on the years of their pilgrimage can see starting up by the way certain milestones which mark its stages. The even tenor of life is often broken by an unexpected event, either joyful or sorrowful, and then the storm passes, or the keen edge of joy is subdued, and we go on again till another check, or impetus, as the case may be, is given to our lives.

We stand on the brink of change, which comes on us all unawares. The impenetrable veil drawn between us and the next day—nay, the next hour—is one of the merciful arrangements of this mutable life of ours. I say arrangement, or rather, I should say, “God’s ordering,” for now, in old age, I can feel, with thankfulness, nothing happens by chance, and nothing walks with aimless feet.

CHAPTER XII.

A CROWN OF HAPPINESS.

I FOUND Lady Mervyn's welcome on my return to Bath, and her sympathy as she listened to the account of my first play, and its effect on me, very sweet.

Lady Mervyn was so restful; there was always about her an atmosphere which seemed to infect those around her with peace. Yet she was not a colourless person; she had a keen interest in all that passed in the world, and she read both French and Italian literature. It was Lady Mervyn who first taught me to love Dante. She would read some verses of a canto in the music of the Italian tongue, and then go over it again in English, with the expression in the cadence of her voice which brought out the poet's hidden beauties—beauties hidden even now from careless readers. But then Dante's *Paradiso* and *Inferno* were sealed books to the great majority of people.

There was a great deal of false sentiment abroad in those days of my youth. The vase, bedecked with pink ribbons, into which Lady Miller invited contributions of poetry to be dropped, and crowned the successful versifier with a wreath, had its votaries in Bath at this time. Lady Miller had gone to the Clifton Hot Wells in the hope of curing the consumptive disease which was undermining her strength. She was dead, but many

of the *élite*, who frequented what was called the "Fair of Parnassus" every Thursday, and dropped their doggerel rhymes, full of sentiment and affectation, into the vase, remained.

The reputation of Lady Miller's "Fairs of Parnassus" had spread far and wide, and some of the poems were, doubtless, worth hearing. Mr. Sheridan had honoured it with a contribution, and the lovers of *belles lettres*, as they styled themselves, did, on occasion, produce something worthy of remembrance.

Lady Mervyn used to tell me that when she was a young girl she had knelt once to receive a laurel crown from the hands of Lady Miller, and that she had felt elated at an honour at which she could now laugh. Her verses, she said, were full of soft-blowing zephyrs, and posies and enchanting scenes, which, at the moment, she thought well described what she felt one summer morning as she walked with her father over Combe Down.

Lady Mervyn recalled how Sir Melville made sport of the "zephyr breath" and the "enchanting scenes," and said he did not care for highflown sentiment.

"For," Lady Mervyn said, "my husband was my friend long before I thought I should ever be his wife. It seemed so improbable that he would care to marry a portionless girl and make her mistress of his fine mansion."

Then she would say she had known many years of happiness with Sir Melville, and must do her utmost to comfort him in the disgrace which his only son had brought upon his name.

The weeks went by, and many of the winter and

early spring visitors had left Bath. The D'Eyncourts were amongst them, and I was, I confess, very glad to see the last of Mrs. D'Eyncourt, and by no means pleased to hear that she proposed to invite me to make a home with her at Windsor when Letitia married.

Letitia was, perhaps, the last young woman who looked likely to be chosen for a wife. But a good clergyman, who had a living in Berkshire, having met her, and gauged her good qualities and her worth, proposed to her before he left Bath, whither he had come to drink the waters for an attack of rheumatism. Letitia announced her engagement to me with the preface,—

“Everyone thought I should be an old maid,” and, with refreshing candour, she added, “I thought so too. I know I am plain, and I think living with so much nonsense going on around me I have rather prided myself in speaking out what I think. It is my mother’s way; she can’t help it. She gushes over everyone, and tells them, as she told you, they are sweet creatures, and lovely, and it is all froth. She soon tires of everybody, and the saints of one day, in her eyes, are the sinners of the next.”

“I was one of the last,” I said, laughing, “that night at Bristol.”

“Yes, you were, and she rakes up the story of your flight from Windsor when she wants to amuse her company.”

“I wish you could stop that story,” I said, “being repeated.”

“My dear, I have tried, but you might as well try to stop a rushing stream by throwing pebbles into it.

Poor mamma!" Letitia ended, "she has been flattered and made much of all her life, and that is a bad training, of which I know nothing. I ought to do the reverse more credit."

When the D'Eyncourts had left Bath I saw less of Virginia, for I did not care for the society of the Pump-room, and while Lady Mervyn went to the baths with Sir Melville, I devoted more time to Barbara, sweet Bébé, whose lovely eyes shine out on me now with the lustre of perpetual and innocent childhood. She was a tender and gentle little creature, and I am glad to think she had never a cross or impatient word from my lips. Her nurse was sometimes sharp on her little faults, but I never found it in my heart to chide her; and, indeed, they were but the little failings common to all children, and needed but gentle reproof.

As the weather grew hot in that summer, Lady Mervyn determined to return to Bromley Park, leaving Sir Melville as long as the doctor thought necessary to effect a cure of his gout.

"I think," Lady Mervyn said, "Bébé is showing signs of lassitude, and, after all, the air of Bath is town air, and that of Bromley is more invigorating."

So it was decided that we should return to Bromley, and orders were despatched for the preparation of one wing of the house to receive us.

It was June now, and the country was in the full glory of early summer, so the thought of the beautiful park and the rambles in the grounds was very tempting to me.

I went, on the day before our departure, to bid Mr.

Beauchamp good-bye. He was very weak, and said pathetically,—

“I shall have to stay here to the end. I shall never be removed from Bath alive.”

I could scarcely contradict him, for he looked so altered, and there were none of the sallies of wit and humour with which he used to answer me in the earlier times at Hillside.

“I want to ask you, little Marjorie, if you see much of Virginia?”

“I have not been to the Pump-room so often,” I replied, “and only to two of the balls. Lady Mervyn has no taste for gaiety now Sir Melville is so greatly troubled about his son’s conduct; therefore, since Mrs. D’Eyncourt left Bath, I have passed my time principally with little Bébé.”

“Ah! I am uneasy about Virginia; she is what is called stage-mad, or stage-struck. She frankly told me the other day that it was only her love for me that kept her from the stage; and I believe when I am gone she will take her own way and join some company. Her poor mother has no sort of influence over her, and I was wondering if you could say a word of warning to prevent her from taking this step. While she was lame it was a barrier, and even now I doubt if she could go through all she fancies she could; and then all the surroundings of the stage are unwholesome—a bad air for a girl like my Virginia to breathe. I believe she thinks she will end in being a second Mrs. Siddons. Poor child! poor child! Marjorie,” Mr. Beauchamp went on to say, “I hope your life will not be as full of disappointment as mine has been. Though I say but little, this con-

tinual reference to sacred things, the quoting of Scripture at every turn, which my wife has caught since she joined that conventicle of my Lady Huntingdon's, and the talking about frames and feelings, are what I cannot bring myself to approve or practise; it is very distasteful to me. The soul is, and must be, alone with God in all its phases of repentance and distress for sin in life and in death. I have gone through it all, as you, when you have heard me laugh and jest with Virginia, would scarcely believe. Nevertheless, it is true. I have struggled hard against rebellion at God's will laying me low ere I had reached middle life, and condemning me to the helpless condition of an old man or a child. It has been a hard fight, but I have got the victory by God's grace. If trouble comes to you, my child, in future years, remember you have God on your side, and need not fear what man can do to you."

Something in Mr. Beauchamp's manner affected me deeply. I, too, have always had that shrinking of which he spoke of talking of sacred things, and sounding my secret struggles, or hopes and fears, in every ear. I understood Mr. Beauchamp, and could sympathise with him from my heart, when Mrs. Beauchamp appeared, bringing in one of the good but injudicious exponents of the new doctrines, saying to her husband,—

"My dear friend is come to speak to you about your soul, and find out from you what is your ground of faith."

I bent over Mr. Beauchamp's couch, and taking his hand in mine, kissed it, whispering,—

"I had better leave you now, sir."

He smiled a sweet, patient smile, and sighed out,—

"Yes, it is better. God bless you, little Marjorie."

So we parted, and I never saw him again.

Remembering her father's wish, I hoped to find Virginia alone. I went into the parlour before I left the house, and there I saw Virginia, with a flushed face and in evident excitement.

"Oh! here you are, you good, pious little thing. Well, what is it? You look very grave."

"I have been saying my farewell to your father. We are leaving Bath to-morrow."

"Oh! poor daddy; I know he wants to get back to Hillside. He is much better than he was last week, and it is shameful not to humour him. My mother can't tear herself away from these Vineyards people. It must be sour grapes she gets there, for she is as sharp and cross-grained as she can be. Oh! you look shocked, and think I am a very undutiful daughter; but you see there are faults on both sides; so I take my way and my mother takes hers. There is no harm in that."

"I only think," I replied, "that if I had had my mother I should have loved her so much. Her way would have been my way."

"That's sentimental nonsense. I warrant you would have been like other girls, and done as you chose, as I mean to do."

"That is what I wanted to say, Virginia. Mr. Beauchamp is very much worse, not better; and he says it would make him unhappy if you persist in going on the stage."

"Now, I call that real absurdity. No one has praised my little bit of acting as he has; and I have recited the sleep-walking scene in 'Macbeth,' and Ophelia in 'Hamlet' a dozen times to him at least."

"Not lately—not for the last few weeks."

"No, perhaps not; but that makes no difference. I shall *not* promise to give up a career. I have taken advice, and the first chance I have I am going to get an interview with Mrs. Siddons or Mr. Kemble, and hear what they say. I have the gift, I know I have, and I shall use it if I can."

"It is not everyone who rises as an actress, and there are many who fail. Even such a genius as Mrs. Siddons has, I hear, had a hard struggle; and then the people about a theatre are not particular what they say or do."

"And do you suppose, you little innocent, that the hangers-on about these ball-rooms and the Pump-room are particular? I could tell you a different story. Just before you came in I had sent a man about his business—a lord, too, who dared to approach me with his sickening attentions—the brute! And as for you, Marjorie, I should have thought Mr. Mervyn had given you a taste of what these idle, good-for-nothing beaux can say, ay, and do."

All reference to Mr. Mervyn always hurt me, and I now felt very angry with Virginia, thus to meet my well-meant attempt to make her give up the idea of going on the stage.

"I shall not say any more to you if you can be so mean as to taunt me with what was one of the most hateful things that ever has or ever can happen to me. No, I will not stay," as Virginia began to laugh, and try to kiss me, saying I took jests as earnest, and I was a little fool to do so. "It is no jest to me," I replied, "and I know you will be sorry when it is too late, if you disregard your father's wishes. Good-bye, Virginia."

And so we parted, my heart swelling with indignation that Virginia should hark back on a passage in my life when I was the innocent victim of a deep-laid scheme, the memory of which brought burning blushes to my face and hot tears to my eyes.

The return to Bromley Park was somewhat sad. The greater part of the old mansion was closed, and only one wing left for use. So heavy had been Sir Melville's losses, through the conduct of his son, that he was seriously straitened for money. Sir Melville was a man of strict integrity, and he had paid up what are called debts of honour, though it were better to call them debts of dishonour.

Lady Mervyn, having told me the bare facts, did not indulge, as she might have done, in invective against her stepson, but bore the burden laid on her by his means with the beautiful patience and even cheerfulness of a Christian gentlewoman.

I had seen very little of Mr. Willoughby for some months. He had been absent in London, and, as I believe, giving his whole time and thought to the settlement of Sir Melville's affairs. I did not forget him; he was ever before me as the ideal gentleman who had treated me, the poor parson's daughter, with all the courtesy, and even respect, with which he would have treated one of the princesses at Windsor. Sir Melville looked to him for everything, and he had shown such an aptitude for business, curtailing expenses and looking to the better cultivation of the land still left to the estate, that in a few years, he said, Lady Mervyn told me, the losses would be in great measure recovered.

It showed how great was the confidence Lady Mervyn placed in me that, on her return to Bath, she left me with her child and a trusted housekeeper, who was a gentlewoman of fallen fortunes, and had found a home at Bromley Park, where she superintended the diminished household—a remnant of the large staff of servants, and the chef in the kitchen, who had wasted of late more than he used in extravagant dishes for dinners and suppers which had been often left untasted.

Mrs. Cremer was a plain and somewhat dull woman who, thoroughly honest and straightforward, was not a lively companion. But I found in Barbara's dawning intelligence a continual pleasure, and the rambles in the park with her remain in my memory as the brightest spots of that part of my life. I was careful not to pass the boundary and find myself in Mr. Willoughby's grounds, remembering the first time I strayed into them. But one day Mrs. Cremer, saying she had been invited by his housekeeper to see his house and the rare china which he had inherited with the place, asked me to accompany her. Believing Mr. Willoughby was in London, I agreed to do so, and we set out one lovely July afternoon, when the heat had moderated, to pay the neighbouring estate a visit. Barbara was full of glee, chasing butterflies and dancing about as airily as they did.

We had not dispensed with Pearson's company on this occasion, for Mrs. Cremer and I both felt that Barbara enjoyed, when we were there, freedom from the continual reproofs which her nurse thought it her duty to administer. We sat down for a time in the alcove by the lake, where, at a time which now seemed long ago, I had watched the swans sailing over its placid

surface. Barbara had brought some bread in her basket to feed the swans, and Pearson holding her hand, she stood on the bank throwing the morsels to the birds, who came sailing up to her. As Pearson was with Barbara I had no fears about her, and was glad Mrs. Cremer had nothing to say beyond commonplaces as to the weather and the beauty of the place to disturb my meditations. So much had happened since the day when I had sat in that alcove and looked out on the fair scene before me; and I could not help questioning how it was that of late Mr. Willoughby had not seemed to desire to have anything but ordinary intercourse with me.

I had, as was natural, received attentions from the gentlemen at Bath, especially from one with whom I had stood up in a country dance and minuet at one of the balls. I liked him well enough, but he was not Mr. Willoughby. He was a little free in his flattering manner, and sometimes, I am ashamed to confess, I liked it.

Once, I recalled, I had a grave look from Mr. Willoughby, and I remembered that I saw him talking to Virginia soon after, and she was flirting her fan and laughing. Something told me it was about me they were talking, and yet I accepted another invitation to join in a dance, and walked about the ball-room on my partner's arm, avoiding Mr. Willoughby and not looking at him. He was not often at the balls, nor was I, and very soon after this he was absent on Sir Melville's business, and we did not meet frequently.

I do not know why all this passed through my mind as I sat in the alcove on this July afternoon.

"It is time for us to move on, Mistress Marjorie." Mrs. Cremer's voice awoke me from my dreaming; but

another sound followed—a scream, a piercing scream, and Pearson, wild with terror, cried helplessly,—

“She has fallen into the water! Help, help!”

I rushed down to the lake, and caught sight of Bébé’s little pink hood just above the surface. I threw off my straw hat and went into the water, without thinking of anything but that I must save the child. Pearson and Mrs. Cremer ran in wild terror, calling for help; and it came.

I was unable to swim, but I caught Bébé’s skirt, and then darkness closed over me, and I knew no more—no more till I found myself lying on the floor of the alcove, and, opening my eyes, saw the face I had dreamed of for so long gazing down on me.

“Thank God! thank God!” Mr. Willoughby said.

“Bébé, Bébé! Is she safe? Oh, tell me!”

“Yes. You have, I trust, saved her life.”

I closed my eyes again, and only heard the confused murmur of many voices, but not the child’s. I struggled to my feet. Mr. Willoughby tried to detain me, but I tottered out of the alcove. On the turf lay sweet Bébé, with no sign of life. I knelt down by her, and heard someone say, “The child is gone.”

Then Mrs. Pearson raised her in her arms, and with her dear head hanging over her shoulder she carried her to the house, I following, faint and cold, my teeth chattering in my head, and dimly conscious that there was an arm round me to support me, and I heard my name again and again,—

“Marjorie, sweet Marjorie, if she lives you have saved her.”

“If she lives! Oh! do not say *if*. I must die if she dies!” and many more incoherent words followed.

And when I reached the parlour where the child was laid, hot blankets and all the usual restoratives being tried without avail, I fell prone on the floor, and again blissful unconsciousness drew its veil over me and the terrible fear that Barbara might be dead.

From this swoon I was long in recovering, and when I did recover the beams of the western sun was streaming through the lattice, and illuminating a picture opposite me.

A picture! What picture? Was I still dreaming? Surely I must be dreaming.

"It is so like Mr. Romney's picture of—"

"Of you," a voice said near me. "It is your portrait. And now thank God, for Bébé lives. They have carried her home, and messengers have been despatched to Bath, and a doctor was found close by on his way from Bradford."

"I must go to Bébé. Let me go, sir, please."

Mr. Willoughby had taken my hands in his, and looking down at me, said,—

"Not till the parson's daughter has promised to forgive me for buying her portrait from Mr. Romney. Say, will she forgive me?"

I wonder now how I could speak as I did out of the very fulness of my heart. But in the supreme moments of life all formal conventions vanish, and we are our real selves.

"I am so glad you care to have my portrait, sir," I said.

"I care to have it, and to have *you*," he answered. "Marjorie, sweet Mistress Marjorie, you will not say me nay?"

A great flood of happiness swept over me as I tried to answer, but words failed me. I laid my head on his shoulder as he knelt by me, and then all was forgotten in the bliss of knowing that he loved me.

"My mother's chair is ready. It has not been used since her death. I will lift you into it, and draw you myself to Bromley."

I now found Mrs. Cremer was near at hand, and that all my wet clothes had been removed by her, and that I was wrapped in a long morning-gown, which Mr. Willoughby's housewife had provided from the wardrobe of her late mistress.

I had no memory of this. I was in a half swoon for some time, and not till repeated cordials had been passed through my lips did I recover. Then they had summoned Mr. Willoughby to see me as I lay in his library, where my portrait by Mr. Romney hung.

"Do you know," Mrs. Cremer said, "that you saved the child's life by your courage? Sir Melville and Lady Mervyn will be eternally grateful to you."

"Yes, in truth, you earned their gratitude," the housekeeper said. "Mrs. Pearson ran about screaming and the child was sinking in the water, and then—"

I could not bear any more. My tears choked me, and I raised my hand in appeal. Mr. Willoughby said,—

"Stop, she cannot bear it;" and then lifting me in his arms he carried me to the Bath-chair and placed me in it. A manservant stood by it, and was taking up the handle, when Mr. Willoughby said, "Go behind, I will take the handle."

So we went along in the calm twilight of the summer evening, and at my heart was a strangely mingled sense

of sweetness and something almost akin to fear lest the great happiness which had come to me should slip from my grasp before I had really made it my own. Thus it was with no exultant joy, rather with a subdued satisfaction in the possession of a love like this, which had come to me unawares, I may say, for of late I had banished from my mind the thought of Mr. Willoughby entertaining any sentiment for me beyond a friendship such as a man might feel for a woman years younger than himself. Now I found I had loved him from the first moment he had filled my almost childish heart with admiration as he walked, erect and with his head raised, as if determined to meet what was before him with a good courage, a press-man on either side of him, to the little, quaint prison-house on the old bridge of Bradford-on-Avon.

The meeting that night with Lady Mervyn, and all she said to me as she folded me to her heart, I may not record here. Even in my diary of that eventful July day I made but little reference to it. In truth the supremest moment of our lives will not bear to be put into words. Surely all Lady Mervyn said, in the fulness of her heart of gratitude that Béb  was restored to her, and that I had, by God's help, saved a life so precious to her mother, may be left to imagination. The words are even now written on my heart, and are amongst the treasured possessions which lie where human eyes cannot see them.

B b  soon recovered, and one golden day in a calm September she was dressed in white taffeta and trotted behind me as my bridesmaid when I was married to Roland Willoughby. In spite of disabling gout, Sir Mel-

ville gave me away to his nephew in the little village church hard by the entrance to the park. He was munificent with his gifts, and I scarcely knew myself when arrayed in satin which had the hue of a dove's wing, the sacque falling over a pearl embroidered underskirt, jewels flashing on my throat and wrists, and my head covered with a rich and costly veil of lace. I saw myself arrayed for my bridal in the mirror in Lady Mervyn's own chamber.

Poor Pearson, who had been much depressed since Bébé's accident, looked at me with admiring eyes. The poor woman had hidden herself when Lady Mervyn arrived that night from Bath, and expected her dismissal. But the best of mistresses sent her a reassuring message, and, instead of being severely reprimanded for carelessness, and dismissed, Lady Mervyn bade her thank God the child's life was saved, and said she could and would trust her for the future, for she knew she loved her Bébé and was devoted to her, and would serve her well from that time.

Nor was her confidence misplaced. Never was a nurse more devoted throughout Bébé's childhood, nor in the future time, when she was her faithful waiting-maid and never-wearied attendant in sickness and in health.

There were no guests at our wedding, for Sir Melville shrank from meeting his friends and neighbours in the county while his son's conduct was still fresh in everyone's mind.

Then Roland and I walked to our house together in the moonlight, which made the dew of the autumn night as a carpet of jewels at our feet, and chastened with a silvery radiance the golden leaves which hung on

the lowest branches of the trees, and touched my bridal gown with soft lustre. Silently we walked together to our own door. There Roland paused, and bade me look at the words he had ordered to greet my eyes on first entering the Down House as my home.

"It is Latin," I said. "Dear love, I cannot read it."

The words were, "*Pax intrantibus, salus exeuntibus*," and below the letters of our names, "R. M. W. twined together with a true lover's knot, with the date of our wedding.

Ah, happy memory! but happiest of all that moment when my husband led me to his library and, looking at me with earnest wistfulness, gently removed the white hood, lined with pale blue, which had protected my head from the chill air of evening, and the beautiful cloak of rich brocade which covered my dress, and said,—

"The parson's daughter in her plain kerchief and brown frock, with the little tendril of hair caressing her cheek, is gone, and remains only in Mr. Romney's portrait. Here is a grand lady ready for Court to take her place."

"Oh, how can you say so? How dare you say so?" I exclaimed. "I shall ever be the parson's daughter to you, and no jewels nor lace nor finery can alter the fact that you blessed her with your homage and love when she was but an insignificant little schoolgirl.

For he had told me his love for me was no new thing, and that it had its birth when, as a child, I followed him to the little prison-house, and he heard me say I was sorry for him.

BOOK III.

MARRIED LIFE AND LATER YEARS.

1807-1813.

IN 1008

THE STATE OF NEW YORK

IN SENATE

JANUARY 10, 1908

REPORT OF THE COMMISSIONER OF THE LAND OFFICE

IN RESPONSE TO A RESOLUTION PASSED BY THE SENATE

APRIL 10, 1907

ALBANY: J. B. LIPPINCOTT & COMPANY, PRINTERS

1908

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CHAPTER XIII.

VIRGINIA ONCE MORE.

1807. I have been some time meditating how far anything I have recorded of the years immediately following my marriage would be of interest to anyone who may chance to read the story of my life.

So peaceful was that life I led in my husband's house, so full of simple joys—sometimes shadowed, as all earthly joys must be, by little cares—which, as they were borne for him, were sweet—that I find my old diaries show here and there only a repetition of the entries of events which were of scant importance to any but ourselves.

Before I come to the year which stands at the beginning of a new book in my history, I will gather up briefly the threads of the story, as it concerns those of whom I have written in the earlier portions of the narrative.

One of these friends, as I must yet ever call her—Virginia Beauchamp—had practically vanished from our sight.

After Mr. Beauchamp's death Hillside was in the market, and we heard that Mrs. Beauchamp had used her fortune for the building and endowing of the chapels,

known as Lady Huntingdon's chapels, in several towns of the west of England.

Virginia wrote once to me after her father's death, to say that she was leaving her mother and was about to take up the profession of an actress. She said she was at liberty to use the portion of money left her by her father as she chose, as her mother had done with hers, and she did not wish any inquiries to be made about her, adding, "When she was famous she would tell me; that I might go and see for myself what she could do, and Mr. Willoughby should find out that she was able to take care of herself."

I made frequent expeditions to Bradford, and delighted my old governesses by paying them a visit.

They kept up their school till Miss Castle died, and then Miss Betty, having lost her stay and prop in life, came to live in a cottage belonging to us on Roland's estate, and there lived in peace. Her little mind had never been able to grasp anything beyond the small events of a daily round under her sister's guidance, and when she lost her she busied herself in the little poultry-yard we made for her, counting with pride her new-laid eggs, and in raising cabbages and lettuce in the garden.

It was always a day of small things with Miss Betty, but she was simple-minded and truthful, and may be said to have lived in charity with all men.

Mr. Orpin passed away soon after my marriage, but I saw him in his decline and he was quite alive to the stories I told him of Mr. Romney's studio and of my portrait as the parson's daughter. He had a vivid remembrance of the day when I first took shelter in his house from the rain, and would recall Tilly's exhorta-

tions to me to take care not to wet my skirt by walking in the puddles at his gate with my clogs for the pleasure of doing so and hearing the splash of the water.

Through my husband's abounding kindness Tilly was allowed to end her days under our roof. Her days of work were over, but it pleased her to busy herself with little matters in the kitchen and still-room, and recount to the maidservants stories of me, when I was like the picture in the master's library, as the parson's daughter.

Nothing had been heard for all these years, that is from 1795 to 1806, of Mr. Mervyn.

By the skill and care of my husband and his attention to the management of Sir Melville's large estate, much of the losses had been made good by less lavish expenditure and better cultivation, so that in a time of artificial prosperity, when the farmers profited by the high prices of wheat caused by the foreign wars, the poorer tenants on the estate suffered less privation than fell to the lot of many.

Lady Mervyn wished to live in retirement till Bébé was old enough to be presented at Court, when, she used to say, she should keep open house once more, as in times past.

Sir Melville was still a great sufferer from gout, thus he was not fit to exercise the hospitality of earlier days. Moreover, he had never recovered from the shock of hearing of Mr. Mervyn's perfidy and dishonesty. It was a subject never mentioned, and my dear Roland was everything to him, and bore him all the affection of a son. His mother had been very much loved by Sir Melville, and her death early in life, so soon followed by her husband's, had been a great grief to him.

It was a sorrowful reflection sometimes, when looking over the wide acres of Bromley Park, that the heir had been so sad a rake, and was now a wanderer in foreign lands and had gone nigh to break the heart of an indulgent father.

My own happiness in those first years of married life was chastened by the deaths of my two infant children, who only just opened their eyes on this world and then took flight to another. After my second loss, I was a good deal broken down in health and spirits. I feel sure every mother who has had a like experience will understand that the loss of infants of days—accounted by the outside world as of but little importance—has a far deeper meaning for the mother's heart. To have the sweet cup of bliss held to the lips, and then to have it changed to the bitterness of disappointed hope before it has been well tasted, is an experience which must be gone through ere it can receive true sympathy. Yet now, in my old age, I can be thankful that my two darlings were spared the longer voyage over the waves of this troublesome world, and that they entered the haven of peace before adverse winds blew to ruffle the waters. My babes lie side by side in the little churchyard of old Crowcombe, near my father and mother. Their names are recorded there beneath those which I had read on the plain slab of marble on my last visit to my old home:—

ANASTASIA WILLOUGHBY,

AGED TEN DAYS, DIED MAY 1, 1799;

BARBARA, AGED EIGHT WEEKS, DIED JUNE, 1, 1805;

THE INFANT CHILDREN OF

ROLAND AND MARJORIE WILLOUGHBY.

These were my only children. God never gave me another daughter or a son—a gift I sometimes too earnestly desired; but I often silenced the vain wish by saying to my husband, “Are you not more to me than ten sons?”

Barbara, my little Béb , grew into a sweet and attractive girl. She had resident governesses, and masters came over from Bath, her mother superintending her education and jealously guarding her from anything which might sully the innocence and purity of her youth. Her love for me was unchanging, and it was always a delight to me to hear her light footstep in the pleasance and her musical voice calling at my lattice-window, “Marjy! Marjy!” Then her face would appear for an instant, and she would run round to the back of the house, enter by the kitchen, give Tilly a pretty “Good-day to you,” and then hasten to the parlour and throw her arms round me as I lay on my sofa and give me showers of kisses.

It was the early spring of 1806 that Barbara came in full of joyful anticipation.

“We are going to London, Marjy, and you are to accompany us.”

“I, my dear! I cannot take a journey; but I am glad you are to have this pleasure.”

“But I tell you, Marjy, it is all fixed, and Cousin Roland knows all about it. You are to ride in an invalid carriage and be as long on the road as you choose.”

“It is too long a journey,” I said. “I might get to Bath, but, oh! not to London, it tires me even to think of it. Sit down and let us have a quiet talk.”

"You do look tired," the child said, "and I won't tease you any more."

Then she seated herself in her favourite position on a low stool, nestling against me, and drawing my hand round her neck.

Barbara was then fourteen, and she was not as lovely as her mother, but she resembled her in the colour of her magnificent bronze hair and her dark, luminous eyes.

At an age when most girls are *gauche* and awkward, Barbara had a slim, straight figure and moved with the grace of a young fawn. She was accomplished for her years, spoke French and Italian and played on the then enlarged piano which had taken the place of the ugly, square, half harpsichord and half piano such as I strummed on to little purpose in Miss Castle's parlour.

The two governesses, one a French lady, an *émigrée*, of whom there were so many in England at this time, was a gentlewoman of the old *régime*—the Contesse de la Court. She was fortunate in finding a home at Bromley Park, and was a really charming companion for Lady Mervyn in her retirement. The English governess was of another type, and I always thought her too stiff and strict with Barbara—calling her to order for trifling faults and making her lie on a hard reclining-board for two hours daily and sit at her lessons with a terrible instrument of torture known as a back-board.

But Miss Cross was now absent on a holiday, and Bébé was free as a bird from a cage, Madame de la Court exercising a very gentle authority at all times, and now, during the holidays, letting her charge have the unrestrained enjoyment of liberty from lessons, back-boards and reclining-boards.

"Mammie will be here soon," Bébé said. "She told me to run in, for she was talking secrets to Cousin Roland—all about you and London. Oh! Marjy, you'll like to be with us; we shall have a big house in London and see the sights, and the King and Queen, and the Prince of Wales and the Princesses. I know you will be happy if you come. Say so, Marjy."

"I must hear what Cousin Roland thinks. Ah! here he comes, and my lady with him."

They soon bore down all opposition on my part. I pleaded weakness and that I loved my home best and did not greatly care to leave it; but when I was alone with my husband that evening, he said my accompanying Lady Mervyn to London was *un fait accompli*.

"Without consent of the person most concerned," I said, laughing.

"To tell the truth, I will not wait for that consent; there is abundant evidence that you need complete change, and here is the opportunity."

"You will come with me, Roland? I cannot go without you."

"I shall make the journey with you and stay for a time, but it is not possible for me to leave this place without supervision. The steward and the bailiff are both growing old, and it is only from my uncle's kindly consideration that they are not superseded by younger men."

I know that the months after the death of my last babe, who had been old enough to entwine herself round my heart, were among the saddest of my life. I found it difficult to bend my will to God's. I was listless and

querulous at times, and nothing could exceed the patience and gentle forbearance of my husband.

Well do I remember that I resented the plain speaking of the wife of one of our neighbours, who bade me rouse myself and not grieve for my dead babies "lest," she said with emphasis, "a worse thing come upon you."

Yes, there could indeed come a "worse thing," and I recalled the words afterwards.

It was evident that those who encouraged me to make this effort to change the current of my thoughts by a complete change were right.

We were some time making the journey, halting at Bath and Reading.

We saw Mr. Siddons at Bath, where he now lived almost entirely, on account of his health. Mrs. Siddons was acting at Covent Garden, and there were rumours that the husband and wife had separated.

This was untrue, but the life of a woman on the stage, like Mrs. Siddons, who was the greatest of living actresses, did doubtless cause division between her and Mr. Siddons, though no mother could be more devoted than Mrs. Siddons was to her children. A fierce light beat upon her and all she did, as it must ever beat on all people, whether kings or princes, or those who by their genius in art or literature come prominently before the public.

Mr. Romney was no longer our neighbour in Cavendish Square; he had removed to Hampstead and withdrawn very much from the world, where he had been so much

courted, before he went back to Kendal to die, nursed by a wife from whom he had long been separated.

Since the night at Bristol, when I had seen Mrs. Siddons as Lady Macbeth, I had never been to the play. And now for the second time I was fairly carried away by the enthusiasm which the great actress roused in me when I saw her at Covent Garden as Queen Katharine. We had excellent places in that vast theatre, which in size and magnificence was a contrast indeed to the old, somewhat dingy theatre at Bristol.

But all the accessories of scenery were as nothing to me, in comparison with the thrill of expectation when I heard the words,—

“Katharine, Queen of England, come into court,” and the Queen, making no reply, rose with unspeakable dignity and knelt at the King’s feet.

“Sir, I desire you do me right and justice,
And to bestow your pity on me; for
I am a most poor woman, and a stranger,
Born out of your dominions.

Alas! sir,
In what have I offended you?”

The pathos of that appeal moved me to tears, the whole speech was given as I think no woman but Mrs. Siddons could give it. I felt it was the poor, slighted, loving wife, the injured Queen, the veritable Katharine, and I never once thought that it was Mrs. Siddons who spoke.

This really is the triumph of histrionic art, when the actor of a part like this is lost to those who hear in the character she or he represents.

Then, when she spoke to Wolsey, what a change in

her voice. It was the voice no longer of entreaty, of the well-nigh despairing wife; it was the Queen addressing, in low but ringing tones, a subject,—

“Lord Cardinal,
To you I speak.”

He answers in cringing fashion,—

“Your pleasure, madam?”

“Sir,
I am about to weep; but thinking that
We are a queen (or long have dream'd so), certain
The daughter of a king, my drops of tears
I'll turn to sparks of fire.”

The infinite dignity yet crushing scorn of what followed, I dare not attempt to write of. Throughout the play my whole attention was engrossed by Katharine. It was not till the last scene when the maid Patience says,—

“Do you note
How much her grace is altered on the sudden?
How long her face is drawn? how pale she looks?
And of an earthy cold. Mark her eyes,”

I saw in the waiting-maid, Virginia Beauchamp! I could not be mistaken, and, though my tears fell for the dying Queen, my attention was diverted by the certainty that the maid Patience was Virginia.

Yet never can anyone who heard the last words, as Mrs. Siddons spoke them, ever forget the pathos of,—

“... although unqueened, yet like
A queen and daughter to a king inter me.
I can no more——”

Roland, who had watched me with some concern

fearing the excitement would be too much for me, now said,—

“What is it, Marjorie,” for I daresay my exclamation made him think I had scarce come back from the ideal to the actual.

“I see her, Roland,” I said. “Oh! I must speak to her.”

“Hush, dear, hush! See, the curtain is rising on the last act.”

“I know it is she, though so much changed,” I repeated.

“Whom do you mean?”

“Patience, the maid. She is, she must be Virginia. Let me speak to her.”

A lady near said angrily,—

“Be quiet, madam, you disturb the company.” Then, with a scornful look, she remarked to her companion, “Some country creature, so ignorant, she has never been at a play before.”

The last act was nothing to me. I hated Anne Boleyn for taking the Queen’s place, and, moreover, the Queen was dead and the interest of the play was over. When the curtain fell, Roland said,—

“Are you sure you are not mistaken?”

“Quite sure; let us seek her out; she was my friend in former days.”

“You were hers, rather,” Roland said. “I will make inquiries; then we can see her, perhaps, in the Green-room. I will inquire.”

He left me in one of the lobbies of the theatre, and I sat trembling with anxiety till his return.

Many gay ladies and attendant beaux passed me on

their way out, or waited till the lacqueys came to say their chairs were waiting. I became aware that curious eyes were on me, and I thought Roland long in coming back. There was a crowd in the outer lobby waiting to see Mrs. Siddons pass. She was always beset with flatterers, who offered profuse compliments, threw flowers at her feet, tendered bouquets, and were but little discouraged by her lofty disregard of busy flatterers in this her later life.

Hearing the buzz of voices, and seeing the crowd thickening in the outer lobby, I ventured to peep through the crush which filled the entrance, in the hope of seeing the woman who had moved me so deeply; although it is said to be wisdom never to wish to see an actress out of her character, or an author whose works delight and charm; or indeed anyone who has made, as Mrs. Siddons did on me, a profound impression.

Presently I heard a deep musical voice ask, as the crowd of fashionable dames and obsequious dandies drew aside, "Where is she?" And I saw before me Mrs. Siddons herself on my husband's arm.

"So you would fain hear of my waiting-maid Patience?" Then, "Is this your wife, sir? She has counted but few years, many less than yours."

"That is so, madam," I said. "May I dare to ask for the welfare of a friend, by name Virginia Beauchamp?"

"Ah! I know her not by that name. She has been stage-struck and values her powers too highly; but I have no heart to tell her what is true—that she will never rise to eminence, she is too indolent and self-conscious. If you are her friend, I would advise you to

counsel her to retire from the profession. Miss Wilkinson here will endorse what I say. Is it not so, madam?"

Miss Wilkinson bowed assent, and then Mrs. Siddons, tapping me on my shoulder with her fan, said,—

"I seldom see or notice my audience; no, not even when they show the keenest appreciation; but the reality of your sympathy made me look in your direction. Permit me, sir, she said," turning to Roland, "to offer you and this lady a free pass for several of the plays. Favour me with your address or leave it with Madam Belton, at the lodging where she resides."

Then, with a sweeping curtsey, she put her hand through Miss Wilkinson's arm, and walked through the crowd of her admirers, preceded by the lacquey, who had her carriage in readiness.

The excitement of the evening and all I had gone through made my face flush and heart beat fast, and Roland, always anxious about my health, led me to my chair, refusing to entertain the idea of my seeking an interview with Virginia that night.

In the days in which I am writing my story, there are few people who can realise the *furore* Mrs. Siddons excited. Even at this period her appearance at Covent Garden was greeted with all the old enthusiasm, and it had only been for a season that the public had transferred its homage and gone mad about the boy-actor who was called "The Young Roscius," a prodigy and somewhat of an impostor as well. Mrs. Siddons and her brother gracefully abdicated, I was told, while the Roscius craze lasted, and had appeared but twice in 1804 and 1805. "A pretty, clever boy and nothing

more," was the Queen of Tragedy's verdict when she witnessed a performance of the lad whose supposed rivalry of herself was destined to be short-lived.

Extraordinary and many were the vicissitudes of Mrs. Siddons' career, since she had first been engaged at Drury Lane by Garrick, and proved a failure. How the mortification of her ill-success, instead of dashing her courage, had stung her to noble effort and unremitting toil in perfecting her art, was common knowledge. At Bath she subjected herself to severe training and study, and, as Mr. Beauchamp had told me, became the idol of the playgoers there, before she made her second, and this time triumphant, venture in London, which placed her on the very apex of her fame.

She was indeed a woman of dauntless spirit; if it had not been so, she could never have braved so many difficulties and endured domestic affliction with such fortitude. The loss of her two lovely young daughters, first Maria and then her dearly-loved Sally, had told heavily upon her, but for the sake of the other children she continued to work and delight the world with her genius, though she often craved for retirement and rest.

We found the house in the Strand where Virginia lodged with several other members of the company. My husband left me at the door and I was shown into a small parlour on the ground floor, to wait till Madam Belton, whose room was on the second floor, came.

When at last Virginia entered the parlour, I observed at once that her face had lost much of its youthful bloom, and that disappointment, paint and powder had left their marks upon it. I was amazed to see her pretty hair undressed at so late an hour, and she was

still wearing a loose, rather gaudy, morning *negligée*. She was no longer outwardly the dainty Virginia of Hillside, on whom I had lavished my childish adoration, any more than she resembled Virginia the modish damsel whom I had seen flirting in the Pump-room at Bath.

But it was the same fascinating voice that exclaimed, "Little Marjorie! This is a surprise. How have you found me out, for I am not famous yet?" and with the old warmth, Virginia kissed me.

"I saw you last night in the part of Patience," I said.

Her face clouded.

"An inferior *rôle*, truly," she answered. "You know that I have never yet had a part in which I can advantageously display my talents. I am the victim of jealousy. People I could name are determined to prevent my rising, but in spite of them I will climb to the top of the tree—see if I don't." She gave her head a little toss. "I consider madam herself is to blame. How cold and unsympathetic and high and mighty she is off the stage, with her fine haughty airs, I can't tell you. She shouldn't forget she has known what it is to be hissed in her time. I declare she rants too much for my taste now. And did you not notice the change in her figure? It is becoming portly."

I was amazed at Virginia's audacity in passing these small criticisms on the great Mrs. Siddons, and I said,—

"*Ranting*, as you call it, or no, there seems to be no decline in the plaudits she wins from the English public. Last night she held the audience spell-bound."

"I've no doubt of it. I did not stay till the end. But at the fall of the curtain they roared and yelled, as

is their custom, I'll wager. A British audience is very stupid, Marjorie. It is like a flock of sheep. But now tell me, you dear creature, about yourself. Has your married life proved a bed of roses, and does the halo of romance still shine round the head of your lord and master? What a fine head I used to think it, to be sure, when I was a school-miss full of sentiment."

"I am very happy," I replied, "in the love of a good and loyal-hearted husband; my children died in infancy, and that is my only cross."

"Ah, well! You have been spared the trouble of bringing them up. You look so young, little Marjorie. And you have a complexion still, my dear, as fresh as the rose." Virginia took a fleeting glance at herself in a dingy mirror on the wall as she paid me this compliment and sighed. "I am not looking my best just now," she went on. "I am aware of that. How glad I am that Mr. Willoughby left you at the door."

I then delivered a message from Lady Mervyn to Virginia, which expressed the hope that, for the sake of old times, she would come and drink a dish of tea at Cavendish Square when she was at leisure.

"Leisure! I have plenty of it," she said. "The part of Patience needs little study. I have understudied Anne Boleyn, but the chance of playing it does not arise. And in the next play, 'Coriolanus,' I am cast for Virgilia; imagine how well it is calculated to show me off. I have nothing to say or do, but to shrink behind Volumnia's ample skirts. You know Coriolanus addresses his wife as his gentle silence. To act *silence* is hardly likely to advance me, is it?"

Virginia beat her small foot impatiently on the floor,

frowned* and pouted and seemed to fall into a reverie of thwarted ambition. But when I took my leave, she threw off her depression, called me her sweet little *matronly* Marjorie, embraced me and promised to come and see me at Lady Mervyn's before long. I was touched by her demonstrations of affection, but felt a secret dismay at the recklessness and flippancy of her manner.

It was ten days later that Virginia came one morning to call on me at Cavendish Square. Barbara was busy at her tambour frame in the drawing-room when she was announced, and looked admiringly at Madam Belton, whose hair to-day was carefully arranged beneath a picturesque beaver hat. She wore a double-breasted violet redingote over her sprigged muslin, and as the air was chilly though it was the merry month of May, she carried a large sable muff. The morning walk had given Virginia a colour, and her eyes were brilliant with excitement, but the excitement of anger it proved afterwards, when Barbara had left the room.

"I have not come to pay my respects to Lady Mervyn to-day," Virginia said, "but to see you alone, Marjorie. I desire to tell you how unhandsomely Mr. Kemble has behaved. After 'Coriolanus,' he informs me that my engagement will terminate. I never expected this. Of course it is Mrs. Siddons' doing. She has influenced her brother, and it is most abominable, most cruel."

There was no affectation in Virginia's distress; she seemed to feel keenly her position.

"Dear Virginia," I said, "I am indeed sorry for you. But did you not say the other day you were dissatisfied with your parts at Covent Garden? Could you not ob-

tain an engagement at another theatre where perhaps you would get promotion more speedily?"

"It would be beginning all over again," Virginia said, "to try; it is not as if I had made a name. Wouldn't I go fast enough if I had to Mr. Sheridan and ask him to engage me at the 'opposition house,' Drury Lane. Then I could afford to snap my fingers at Mrs. Siddons, Mr. Kemble, that prude Patty Wilkinson and all of them. As it is, my prospects have been blighted, my career wilfully blasted by jealousy and spite."

I refrained from adding fuel to the flame of Virginia's indignation by repeating what Mrs. Siddons had said to me in the lobby of the theatre, about the advisability of my friend withdrawing from the profession altogether. Instead, I remarked,—

"Mrs. Siddons was so gracious to me and Roland that night we begged of her your address. Only to-day she has sent us passes for a box to see the 'Fatal Marriage.'"

"Ah! it was I who gave Miss Wilkinson the information as to where you were staying. She inquired at rehearsal. Perhaps, Marjorie," she went on quickly, "as the great lady has conceived such a violent liking to you, you might intercede for me. What do you think?"

I intercede! on the strength of one short fleeting personal interview with the actress. I was much taken aback at the proposal, yet Virginia exercised on me all her old persuasive arts to such effect that in the end the missive was penned. In it I set forth that my friend regretted her inattention to the niceties of her parts and her earnest desire to amend and take more trouble in the future. For Virginia, now that it had come to the

point of her connection being severed with Mr. Kemble's company, appeared to have lost that great confidence in her own genius and ability to rise in spite of all opposition, which she had expressed to me so freely the other day in the parlour of her lodgings.

Roland had gone back to Wiltshire, and I could not consult him before I despatched my letter; but Lady Mervyn gave it as her opinion that at least it could do no harm. And indeed it did not, but great good in that it brought me an invitation to pass some hours at Westbourne Cottage, Mrs. Siddons' bijou country retreat at Paddington.

Thus one of the most memorable experiences I have to record here I owed indirectly to Virginia.

CHAPTER XIV.

MRS. SIDDONS AT HOME.

How distinctly I recall every incident of that bright afternoon in May—the afternoon I spent at Westbourne Farm, and was privileged to meet in the intimacy of private life the woman of genius who in public had so profoundly impressed me.

Lady Mervyn took me in her phaeton, and as we drove along the Edgware Road between hedges white with hawthorn and fields of golden buttercups, she told me we might expect to find a string of chairs and coaches waiting at the gate. But, to my relief when we arrived this was not the case to-day, and I had reason to hope I was the only invited guest. The footman rang the outer bell and then Lady Mervyn left me, to pay a visit at Hampstead. I followed a neat maidservant up the poplar avenue to the cottage with the gabled roof which stood almost hidden on this side in a bower of lilacs and laburnums. It was charmingly situated and from the windows of the quaint little drawing-room upstairs, into which I was shown, the prospect was enchanting. Beyond the flower-garden, shrubbery and low-lying verdant meadows, were the breezy heights of Hampstead and Highgate, wrapped in a silvery haze. I felt an emotion of awe creep over me, as I stood in this rustic sanctuary of genius. I had been told how, when

she had no home but lived in lodgings and hotels, Mrs. Siddons, instead of rearing a "lordly pleasure-house," in imagination, was content to build this cottage in her dreams. She was wont to call it "that dear hut, my home." But it was a luxurious "hut" truly, daintily and tastefully furnished, and she had added a new wing at the back, with studio (her favourite hobby was sculpture), dining-parlour and guest-chamber.

The room in which I waited her boasted rich damask hangings, spindle-legged Chippendale chairs and sofas, an old spinet, cabinets of rare china, and on the white walls hung innumerable prints and many Bartolozzi engravings from Sir Thomas Lawrence's pictureries of herself and of her distinguished brother in costume. But the crowning glory which gave an undefinable atmosphere of genius to the room was the great portrait of Mrs. Siddons, painted by the master hand of Mr. Gainsborough thirty years before, when she was in the prime of her beauty, and at the zenith of her fame. It hung in a recess in the mellow light cast from a side window, a thing of beauty, I thought, in its noble repose, and wealth of colour that must ever be an undying joy to look upon.

Often as I go back in memory to that day I recall my feelings as I stood in front of the picture, my eyes drinking in its beauties, the pose of the lovely powdered head so clearly defined beneath its dark plumed velvet hat; the clear brunette complexion blending so harmoniously with the delicious cool tints of the blue and white striped gown and its *fichu* and ruffles of soft filmy muslin and lace; and then, turning round and discovering that the original had entered the room unobserved

by me from behind a *portière*. I should have been embarrassed had she not, without a shadow of that pompous stiffness in her manner of which I had heard complaints from those who knew her socially, held out her hand to me and said in her deep, slow voice,—

“Had you known me some twenty years ago, you would have said it resembled me.”

“Ah, madam,” I exclaimed, “indeed it is like you still.”

And I spoke the truth, for the contour of the classic profile remained unchanged, though the majestic figure, as Virginia had disrespectfully remarked, was inclining to stoutness, and time, sorrow and ill-health had made some ravages on the olive smoothness of a once flawless skin.

It seemed her wish to continue conversation on the subject of the portrait, for she sank onto a divan near it and invited me to sit beside her. She looked up a little sadly at the artist's exquisite presentment of her youthful charms, and then said gravely,—

“We cannot always be young”—trite words in themselves; but her air of melancholy and the rich tones of her voice lent them a new significance. “Have you ever had your portrait painted?” she asked, her manner becoming brisker.

“Once only,” I replied, “by Mr. Romney.”

“Ah, indeed, I was never painted by Mr. Romney, though I have sat to more artists than I can count, in my time. Sir Joshua Reynolds would, I believe, have liked to paint me as often as your Mr. Romney painted Lady Hamilton. But even if I had had the inclination I should not have had the time to dispose of thus. An

actress is a servant of the public, and her life must needs be a hardworking and a bustling one—yes, even when success has come,” she added, with another glance at the portrait, a memorial, no doubt, to her of the year when her own success had reached its height after a long struggle against adverse circumstances. “Sir Joshua came to see me act oftener than I went to sit to him,” said Mrs. Siddons. “He was very deaf and always occupied a seat in the orchestra, and there sat too Edmund Burke, Mr. Sheridan and Windham, a glorious constellation.”

Again the proud features wore that expression of reflective sadness. Visions, I had no doubt, were passing before her of those nights of early triumph when she had moved, by her pathos and her power, some of the greatest men of the time to tears.

“Did not Sir Joshua paint you as the ‘Tragic Muse’?” I asked, almost forgetting the object of my visit in the unexpected delight of hearing her talk thus about herself.

“He did indeed,” she answered. “‘Ascend your undisputed throne,’ he said at the first sitting, with a bow, leading me to the platform. ‘Bestow on me some idea of the tragic muse.’ Sir Joshua was courtier as well as painter. When he had finished the picture he inscribed his name on my robe, saying that he would hold it an honour to go down to posterity on the hem of my garment. A pretty compliment, was it not? Very different was Mr. Gainsborough’s manner towards his sitters. He was fond of amusing them with his lively jests. Sometimes he could be startlingly abrupt, as for instance when painting me he suddenly burst forth, after what for him had been a long silence, with, ‘Madam, there is no

end to your nose." If he was so struck with the length of my nose, I wonder he never remarked on the Kemble jawbone, which you see is somewhat accentuated in the picture by the narrow black velvet ribbon tied beneath the chin."

It was Mrs. Siddons, not I, who first reverted to the topic of Virginia.

"I am forgetting," she said, with a smile, "that you came to speak of your friend, and not of my portrait. I may say at once that we have reasons that make it impossible for us to alter our decision with regard to Madam Belton—Miss Beauchamp, you call her, I think—reasons besides the cardinal one that she is really not suited for the dramatic profession. She came with good introductions, and I will not deny that she has a pretty gift for parlour recitation, singing and dancing, but she has not sufficient presence for the public stage, and her voice is too weak to be well heard in a big theatre. Neither has Miss Beauchamp learnt the A B C of her art, nor shown any disposition to apply herself to the drudgery of acquiring it. She is a very graceful, elegant *dilettante*, but beyond that her talent does not reach, her ambition being out of all proportion to her capabilities."

There was such a sternness in her air as she spoke of Virginia, that I durst not interrupt with any supplication in her favour.

"It is truer perhaps of the player's art than any other, that great results cannot be achieved without hard work and ceaseless study," Mrs. Siddons continued. "My own career may serve as an example. Belonging to a theatrical family, I was bred to the stage almost from infancy, and my girlhood was passed in the routine drill

of provincial tours and country theatres. Yet when I first sought the suffrages of a London audience, it was but to find how much I had still to learn. Not till I had trained for seven more years did I appear again on the boards of Drury Lane, and win that reputation which I think I have maintained in spite of the pretensions of would-be rivals. But to return to Miss Beauchamp. Knowing her to be gently nurtured and deeming that perhaps she would be unfit to cope with the coarse associations of the stage, especially with the vicious surroundings of Covent Garden, I promoted her to the privilege of frequenting the first-class Green-room, to which actresses playing small parts and earning inferior salaries are not as a rule entitled. I am bound to say the young lady has not repaid me for my consideration. Instead, it has reached my ears that she has presumed to take part in gossip about my domestic affairs and has helped to circulate stories of a scandalous, nay, I had almost said libellous, character—one of the penalties of success I have always been least able to endure with resignation.”

And now from those wonderful eyes, with their long silken lashes, flashed a spark of the divine inward fire, which in social intercourse slumbered beneath the calmest and iciest exterior, but which consumed her so terribly in her flights of passion on the stage.

I quailed and blushed as hotly for Virginia as I had had occasion to do once before in the days of our girlhood.

“I had no idea, madam,” I stammered, “of anything of the kind, or certainly I would not—”

“Don’t say ‘would not have come here to-day,’” she

interrupted me. "I should have been sorry to have been deprived of the pleasure of this visit. For your sake, I would gladly have taken a more lenient view of Madam Belton's case, but that is impossible." She rose from the divan. "I hear my Cecilia's voice without," she said. "Shall we join the little party who are drinking tea and syllabubs somewhere in the garden?"

I followed her on to the balcony, whence some rustic stairs led to the little garden, with its trim-shaven lawn, bright flower-beds and laurel hedges. A table was spread with fruit and cakes, under a tree, presided over by Miss Wilkinson, the devoted and almost inseparable companion of Mrs. Siddons during many years, and a group of charming girls in airy muslins sat on the grass. As we approached, one of them rose and ran towards us.

"Here is Cecilia, my baby," said Mrs. Siddons, giving the fair, young creature a look of wistful maternal affection. She always feared to see on the face of this her youngest and now only daughter, signs of that "frightful, dazzling delicacy" which, in the case of the two others, had meant consumption, the fatal disease that had taken them from their devoted mother in the flower of their youth and beauty. Mrs. Siddons then presented me to Miss Dorothy Plaice, "the dear friend of my sweet Sally," and to "Harriet, my son Henry's bride."

Cecilia passed her arm through her mother's, and I remember being struck by her saying, playfully, as she led her to the seat of honour—a garden-chair with arms and a cushion, "Come, darling, to your throne," repeating unconsciously Sir Joshua's words, though here it was not the throne of the Tragic Muse but of the fond, hard-working mother, who had ever preferred to spend her

leisure at home with her children to being lionised at dinners and routs, and who was queen in her family circle.

Stately and dignified she must have been in any surroundings, and there was a simple grandeur about her now, sitting with the May sunlight upon her, a figure in severe black draperies unadorned by jewels, her dark hair plainly dressed, her long, mobile fingers caressing the bright head of her child who had thrown herself on the grass at her mother's feet. There was the same sort of fascination for me in watching her in this natural, undress *rôle* of mother and mistress of her home as there had been in seeing her as "Lady Macbeth" and "Queen Katharine."

"We are becoming expert dairymaids, mamma," Cecilia said. "Dorothy and I have been milking the Jersey cow, and have been complimented on the professional way we balanced ourselves on the three-legged stool. 'Mrs. Harry' was too proud to try; instead, she has been in your studio endeavouring to mould in clay a statue of her lord and master as beautiful as Apollo, but somehow or other—I suppose it is the clay's fault—the statue has turned out a Chinese idol."

Young Mrs. Harry, the aspiring sculptress, blushed under her white chip hat and said Cecilia was a quizzing child. And so they prattled on, and only now and again the voice that had thrilled all England mingled like the rich notes of an organ with the light, girlish chatter.

When I rose, at last, to go, Mrs. Siddons bade her daughter show me to the gate. "In case you should lose your way in this extensive domain," the girl said, laughing.

*“The poplar walk if you have strength
Will take a minute’s time to step it;
Nay, certes, ’tis of such a length,
’Twould almost tire a frog to leap it.”*

Mrs. Siddons explained that Cecilia was quoting from some rhymes her husband had composed on her Liliputian country retreat the last time he had visited it.

“Unfortunately, this idyllic air did not suit Mr. Siddons,” she added. “He is a sufferer from such painful rheumatism that he has to live altogether at Bath.”

I had no doubt, as she said this with distinct musical emphasis, she was thinking of reports assigning their separation to other reasons, and imagined these had reached my ears through Virginia. As I was departing, a new arrival tripped over the grass, a fair-haired little lady in a blue pelisse tied with fluttering ribbons, a lace scarf thrown over her head. I heard her exclaim in stammering speech,—

“Che-cherries and syl-la-la-bubs! how de-d-delightfully pastoral and ar-arcadian.”

“That is Mrs. Inchbald,” Cecilia said. “Is she not sweet? She must have been very lovely once, and I wish my Uncle John had married her, stutter and all.”

As a keepsake, I took away from Westbourne Farm a posy of lilacs gathered by Cecilia’s hand. A spray lies before me now, dried and pressed between the yellowing, closely-written sheets of a letter—my own letter that I wrote to my husband from Cavendish Square the day after I visited Mrs. Siddons at Westbourne. So seldom were we separated that he had not many letters of mine, or I of his to preserve. I found this one after his

death tied with faded ribbon, and labelled, "Letter from my dear wife Marjorie, giving an account of her visit to Mrs. Siddons and her conversation with the great actress." Reference to the old letter has made the events of that afternoon as fresh to me as if they had happened yesterday, and so I have been able to record them in some detail.

I looked forward with no pleasure to my interview with Virginia the following morning. I found her in her lodgings, sitting over a cup of chocolate and the despised part of Coriolanus's silent wife.

"Ah, Marjorie, I see by your face what you are going to say," she exclaimed; "her high and mightiness has hardened her heart against me, and turned a deaf ear to your pleadings."

"Yes, Virginia," I answered; "and really now I know all I am not surprised. You did not tell me you had been disloyal to Mrs. Siddons, and had helped to propagate gossip about her. She has evidently small toleration of tittle-tattle."

"Ho, ho! is that it?" said Virginia, getting up and pacing the room in an angry and theatrical manner. "How vastly absurd! as if everyone didn't talk about her indiscretions in that affair with those Galindo people. As if everyone didn't know that she can't, or, at anyrate, doesn't live with her husband. A public character cannot expect to be exempt from public remark. If the Green-room discusses her, it is not my fault. And how noble, how magnanimous to make poor little me the scapegoat of it all."

It was useless to reason with Virginia; she would not listen to me. Fortunately the torrent of her anger

was soon exhausted. As of old, Virginia's moods were variable, fleeting as rain and sunshine in April. Soon she was sipping her chocolate again, with an air of smiling *insouciance*.

"Perhaps, after all, I shall have to resort to matrimony, like you, Marjorie," she said in that tone of flippant banter that distressed me in her so sorely. "There is a mighty handsome young fencing-master ready to die for me, besides an Italian youth who plays the flute in the orchestra; and, I forgot, the prompter has a *tendresse* for me likewise. So, you see, I have plenty of choice."

"Pray do not talk thus, Virginia," I implored her. "I think your father would be grieved to hear you. Lady Mervyn wished me to ask you whether, when your engagement is over at Covent Garden, you would care to give Barbara lessons in elocution. The child recites poetry and herself sometimes composes verses, of which her mother naturally is not a little proud."

Virginia seemed well pleased at the idea, for it was not beneath the dignity of even a distinguished actress in those days to give such lessons as Lady Mervyn proposed, and Mrs. Siddons herself had instructed the young princesses and children of noble families in the art of recitation and elocution.

"She has grown into a prettier girl than I should have expected, that Barbara of yours," Virginia remarked. "She reminds me of a fawn with her long neck and big, soft eyes."

Barbara, on her side, had conceived a childlike enthusiasm for Virginia's grace and charm. So it seemed likely that the arrangement Lady Mervyn wished to make,

prompted by the goodness of her heart, and for the sake of old friendship with Mr. Beauchamp, would answer well. I fervently hoped it would; but I harboured secret misgivings, knowing more of Virginia, in this her later phase, than Lady Mervyn.

Before we left London, I saw Mrs. Siddons act again many times. Very great was her impersonation of the Roman matron Volumnia, and I thought her beautiful as Hermione in "The Winter's Tale"; but never was my first impression of her as Lady Macbeth effaced. It remains to this day vivid as ever. Yet when I think of Mrs. Siddons now, I picture her oftenest, not on the stage at all, but as I saw her sitting beneath the trees at Westbourne, a vision of saddened motherhood, smiling at the gay chatter of the only daughter God had spared her.

Soon after our return to the country, we heard of her husband's death, and a year later of the burning down of the great Covent Garden Theatre, with all stage properties, and many priceless possessions of Mr. Kemble's and Mrs. Siddons'; among them the exquisite lace she had worn as Queen Katharine; lace which had in reality belonged to a queen, the unfortunate Marie Antoinette. So some years yet of work lay before the actress, who at fifty was said to long for, and certainly had earned, retirement.

While funds were being raised for the erection of a new house, more gorgeous than the one that had perished in the flames, Mrs. Siddons acted forty times, within seven months, at the Opera House and Haymarket, a heavy strain on a woman of her age.

Then came those scenes of riot and confusion, which

I heard of but never witnessed, when the mob turned the brilliant new theatre, night after night, into a bear-garden, and agitated for cheaper places, threatening the aristocratic occupants of private boxes with violence. A storm of hoots, yells and cat-calls completely drowned the voices of the actors, and Mrs. Siddons herself gave offence to the revolutionary pit by appearing in a costume worth five hundred pounds, which blazed from head to toe with jewels. Like Queen Charlotte on her way to court, the queen of tragedy, so ran the story, was hustled and mobbed one night on her way to the theatre; but she proved equal to the occasion, and thrusting her head out of the window of her chair, she said, "Good people, let me pass; I am Sarah Siddons." At the sound of that famous voice and name the roughs fell back and a path was made for her instantly.

Thus in town the smouldering epidemic of revolution, which had come to us from the other side of the Channel more than a decade earlier, found its outlet, while in the provinces it took the form of machine-breaking, the destruction of mills, looting of bread-shops, and such-like spasmodic outbursts. The war that enriched the rich impoverished the poor, and never was the social severance of classes more marked than at the time of which I write.

But few in the gay world concerned themselves about the distressful condition of their "hewers of wood and drawers of water," and the majority pursued the daily round of careless pleasure and amusement, unmindful of the lessons taught by the French Revolution. My husband was not one of these, and in days when it was rare indeed for a country squire and landowner to

interest himself in the poor labourers' lot, Roland took their welfare into consideration, and devoted many an hour of anxious study to plans for their improvement. He felt strongly on the injustice of the game-laws, which by his position as a county magistrate he was compelled to uphold. It was pain and grief to him to pass a heavy sentence on some half-starving yokel for shooting a hare or rabbit, when the servants of the landed gentry traded with London poulterers in their masters' game, and went unpunished. Yet for all his efforts, his generosity, and his sympathy with the poor, my chivalrous, loyal-hearted husband, was, alas! destined to fall a victim to the very class-hate and bitterness which in his own sphere, by personal influence, he did so much to soften, and which his indignation at wrong-doing, and pity for suffering, made him so earnestly deplore.

CHAPTER XV.

LIGHTS AND SHADOWS.

AFTER the visit to London we resumed the even tenor of our days, and for some time our life went on smoothly as usual, unbroken by any events more startling than dining or supping at the houses of our neighbours in the county, or in our turn entertaining them in a quiet way.

By day my husband was much occupied on his own and Sir Melville's estate, and he often rode to Bradford, Melksham and Devizes on agricultural business. But when we were alone at home, he generally devoted the evenings to me. Ah! happy evenings! In summer passed in sauntering together on the terrace, beneath sunset skies, or rambling through the green Wiltshire fields, to where the Avon flowed lazily along between its banks of reeds, irises and forget-me-nots; in winter, seated by the wide hearth in our library, with the firelight dancing and flickering on the book-lined walls, and on my portrait which still hung above my husband's writing-table to remind us, if we needed reminding, of our brief and happy courtship, when I wore the simple russet frock and muslin kerchief, and a green ribbon restrained the rebellious curls which Mr. Romney had bid me let rebel.

The purses and doylies I netted in those winter evenings would be too numerous to count. Roland would

often push aside his dry books on agriculture and livestock, and Arthur Young's *Travels*, to read to me, by the light of the tall candles, Cowper's poems or Scott's *Lay*, and *Marmion*, about which then all the world was raving. He read well, and, unlike the convivial fox-hunting squires of the times, he was distinguished by a taste for literature and the classics.

Very precious to me is the recollection of those hours of perfect peace and harmony in the dearest of all companionship. I hear now the wind sighing in the trees without, the solemn measured tick of the Dutch clock, and my husband's voice reading,—

“O woman, in our hours of ease,
Uncertain, coy, and hard to please;
When pain and anguish wring the brow
A ministering angel thou,”

and laying his hand caressingly on my head that happened to be leaning against his knee, he interpolated,—

“I have never found you, dear one, uncertain and hard to please; and, without my brow being wrung with anguish, I have proved your angel ministrations.”

Sweet words were these for a wife to hear, and fondly I cherished them in days that were coming, days of sorrow and bereavement.

I refused the invitation of my kind friends the Mervyns to accompany them to London again the year that Barbara was to be presented at Court and introduced to society, and as my health was perfectly restored and I was able to go about my daily avocations quite briskly, my husband did not urge me, as he had done before, to accept the offer of a change.

Lady Mervyn's and Barbara's letters kept us well

posted up in their gay doings. I gathered from the former that "my sweet girl" was much admired at the great functions at which she had appeared under her mother's watchful care.

"My child's charm lies in her freshness," wrote Lady Mervyn. "At the State Ball, beside other beauties, she was like a wild-rose among exotics. Sir Melville hears that even the *blasé*, jaded eyes of 'The First Gentleman in Europe' rested on our young daughter with approval. But this for me is no high honour, and I almost shuddered when I saw the Duke of York touch her hand in the court quadrille. Thankful am I that her most frequent partner has been a young soldier of manly figure, whose straight, pure eyes tell their own story. If ever I could relinquish my Bébé to a husband's keeping without a pang it would be, I think, to such a one as he."

Barbara's letters were full of joyous, innocent delight in her gaieties, and as the season wore to an end there was nothing in their tone to show that dances and dinners, the opera and Ranelagh, had worn off the bloom of her ingenuous freshness, or damped her healthy, girlish ardour.

"It has all been a whirl, a dream, amazingly delightful and vastly amusing. But I am glad we are coming home next week, back to dear Bromley and to you, Marjorie. And there are going to be fine doings there too. So you see you can't escape! As you wouldn't come to frivolity, frivolity is coming to you! Charming Miss Beauchamp has promised to accompany us, and

arrange an out-of-door entertainment, a masque or something of the kind. The whole county will be invited, and all Bradford and Melksham as well."

I read this passage in Barbara's letter aloud, and I thought Roland received the news of coming festivities at Bromley Park somewhat gravely.

"Barbara has been brought up so quietly and has seen so little society till now," I said; "I suppose it is well that she should have more variety. Lady Mervyn would not do anything contrary to Sir Melville's wishes."

"No; she is always wise in consulting them," Roland answered. "Time necessarily works changes, and I don't doubt that few of the families in the neighbourhood have now anything but the dimmest remembrance of Edgar's disgrace. My uncle has, however, never been the same since, and, I fancy, has become aged and infirm before his time. For my part, I could have wished this threatened outbreak of merry-making had been postponed till times of peace. The war is rapidly pauperising the poor, and things are going from bad to worse. To-day the bailiff brings me word from Bradford that a mill has been sacked and the machinery destroyed. The Flemish operators go in fear of their lives, because they have refused to strike, and there is talk of calling in military aid from the garrison at Devizes."

Such things as my husband related were going on all over the country, and as I said before, the rich and high-born, so long as they were not affected themselves, appeared altogether indifferent.

When the party returned to Bromley Park from London, Lady Mervyn told me that Sir Melville had,

during their absence, had tidings from his son for the first time since he had left the country. His letter had cheered Sir Melville, for he expressed in it contrition for past sins and folly. He told of his marriage some years before to a young Spanish lady in America, who had died when she gave birth to his boy, and her early death had so affected him that he had resolved to lead a steadier life in future. He had not dared to write to his father before, but ventured to do so now, in the hope that Sir Melville, true Christian gentleman that he was, would forgive his wrong-doing and think of him not unkindly, for the sake of his innocent boy.

I rejoiced with my dear friends that Edgar had made this sign, yet I fear both Roland and I found it rather difficult to believe entirely in the scapegrace's reformation.

Bromley Park soon filled with guests, and the grounds rang with merry young voices. Virginia occupied the same rooms in which she had been laid up on that memorable visit years ago. I had not much opportunity of conversing with her alone, for Virginia was just then a very important and busy personage. Her professional experience was relied on to make the theatrical part of the festivities a success, and she certainly threw herself into it heart and soul. She allotted *rôles*, designed costumes, directed workmen, and her word was law at rehearsals. Virginia indeed had been appointed mistress of the ceremonies by Lady Mervyn, and her chief assistant among the guests was young Mr. Pierrepont from Kingston House, Bradford, who wore very limp, low, shirt collars, had travelled on the Continent and was said to be something of a poet.

It was after long and mysterious consultations be-

tween Virginia and her lieutenant that the play was fixed. It was to be Campion's elaborate masque, "The Night and the Hours." A stage was erected on the bowling green, and all the beauties of the neighbourhood were enlisted to take part in the performances.

"Most of them are very wooden and stiff," Virginia complained to me one day when I found her in Lady Mervyn's boudoir, surrounded by clouds of gauze and yards of tinsel. "It is hard work to drill them, and they *will* attach so much more importance to what they are to wear than to what they have to say or how they are to say it. There has been a frightful scene this morning; the fair one who is to impersonate Flora burst into tears because I designed her a garment of pink. When I asked the reason of her tears, she pointed hysterically to her tresses, in which, on near inspection, I discovered a suspicion of carrots. Then Zephyr vowed she would rather die than wear blue, it became her complexion so ill! Now, dear Hours, go and learn your parts," she said, turning to a bevy of young girls at the other end of the room, little more than children, who were laughingly holding the gauzes up to each other's faces before a mirror, to see which colours suited them best.

The "Hours" sped away, and Virginia and I were left *tête-à-tête*, which rarely happened in these busy days.

"You see, Marjorie, how I have descended from my high ambition," Virginia said. "Since I left Mr. Kemble's company I have been doing nothing but this sort of thing. Well, perhaps it is better to excel in a small way than fail in a great. I shall always regard your divinity Mrs. Siddons as the blighter of my prospects. Even since

you saw her last, she has become still more *passée* in voice and person. They say she is madly jealous of the rising star Miss O'Neill, who plays parts like Juliet with a sweetness and tenderness that Mrs. Siddons never possessed, not in her palmiest days."

I felt all my old enthusiasm for the actress flame up again at Virginia's words.

"I am sure Mrs. Siddons is too great to be jealous," said I, "and much do I doubt the name of Miss O'Neill living in history as will that of Mrs. Siddons."

"Upon my word, I didn't know you were a prophetess, Marjorie," Virginia rejoined. "To change the subject, do you know my mother has renewed hopes of my conversion? She writes to me of a certain fashionable lady who was the gayest of gay butterflies, but has now become sobriety itself and has exchanged nodding plumes for a Quaker's bonnet. I can fancy you in dove-grey silk, Marjorie—you would make a pretty little Quakeress—but not myself, not myself."

Virginia fluffed up her hair with her fingers as she spoke, and truly, if that softening halo had been thrust away beneath a cap and cardboard bonnet, her features, which were irregular, would not have been so good to look upon.

At this point Barbara came in, followed by Mr. Pierrepont.

"We have come, on behalf of the company, to beg a holiday from our mistress," Barbara said. "I have conned my part so diligently that, as far as words go, I am quite a perfect 'Night.' Is it not true?" she asked, turning to her companion.

The gentleman looked at her with an expression in his dreamy eyes of somewhat too undisguised admiration.

"As perfect a 'Night,' certainly," he said, "as one whom Nature has selected to incarnate Aurora and the rosy dawn can be."

"Mr. Pierrepont, compliments are not business," said Virginia, with mock severity. "You know Barbara was cast for Night, because of her hair. It is only in the sunlight that it shines like burnished copper, by candle-light it looks black. Now, what about this holiday? I am disappointed in Mr. Pierrepont, if he has been encouraging my company in the idea of substituting a picnic for a rehearsal."

"Oh, it is not his fault," exclaimed Barbara. "I am entirely to blame—it is such a glorious day for views, and there are several of our friends who have never seen Bradford. I want to take them on an excursion, with you, Marjorie, for guide." She turned to me, putting her arms affectionately round my waist. "No one could tell us the history of everything so well, especially of the old bridge, the scene of Roland's adventure with the press-gang."

"I think I know something about that story too," said Virginia, "but I gladly resign my claim to narrating it to Marjorie. The old stories of Bradford have little charm for me, and though I sanction the expedition I shall not take part in it."

"Not only Bradford, but Shockerwick is on the programme," said Mr. Pierrepont, "and we end up with an impromptu collation at Kingston House. I have sent word home that an invasion may be expected."

"I see you have taken the precaution to make all

your arrangements before asking my leave," said Virginia, laughing. "Well, I wish you joy of your excursion, and trust Marjorie will prove an efficient cicerone."

An hour later two carriages stood at the door, in which a gaily-dressed, chattering party were soon seated, I among them. Barbara and the girl who was to impersonate Zephyr in the play rode on horseback, attended by Mr. Pierrepont.

The air blowing from the Downs was so crisp and sparkling, the lights and shadows flitting across the waving cornfields so beautiful to watch, that I enjoyed myself and felt merry with the rest as we drove along the road to Bradford. But when we alighted in the old market-place, with its quaint, Flemish-looking houses, my mood saddened, for I saw around us only too much evidence of the prevailing distress of which my husband had spoken. Groups of men were standing about in patched and ragged clothes, their faces pale and gaunt, their eyes hollow and fierce.

"What a number of ruffianly-looking people for such a small town," remarked one of the Bromley Park guests. "I declare I should be sorry to meet any of them in a dark lane alone."

The other ladies laughed, while Mr. Pierrepont explained that Bradford was full of hands thrown out of employment by the introduction of new machinery in the cloth-mills, while others refused to work for owners who, though they themselves were becoming wealthier every day, still offered their weavers the same starvation wages.

"I knew that sort of thing went on in the North,"

one of the ladies said, "but I thought here, in the West, you were not so dreadfully savage."

We entered the inn where the horses were put up, and were bowed into the coffee-room by the landlord and his wife. The huge joints of cold meat usually met with at country-town inns were arranged on a long table that ran across the low windows opening on to the street. As our party made a pretence of toying with refreshments, for no one after the late and substantial breakfast at Bromley had much appetite for the somewhat heavy viands, a knot of children collected outside and watched us through one of the open windows with wolfish earnestness.

"Poor little things" exclaimed Barbara, compassionately, "this must be tortures of Tantalus to them. Why should we not feed them with all this abundance of provisions? Marjorie, give the word of command and tell the gentlemen to cut sandwiches."

But, before I had time to speak, Barbara had herself impulsively seized a loaf and she began to cut great slices of bread, which were soon supplemented by beef and ham, carved by the young men of the party. They readily entered into the spirit of the frolic, for to them this *al fresco* feeding of the starving juvenile population of Bradford was nothing more.

Barbara stood on the low window-sill, her tall, lithe young figure in its drab riding-habit with primrose-coloured lapels framed in the creepers that grew round the casement. I see her now, her three-cornered beaver hat adorned with a tuft of scarlet pushed a little backwards on the clustering heavy masses of her wonderful hair, the skirt of her dress and her gold-headed riding-whip

tucked under one arm and her white hands busily dispensing the bread and meat.

Again I noticed Mr. Pierrepont regarded her with what I thought too pronounced admiration.

"This is even better than the famous bread-and-butter-cutting scene in *Werther*," he remarked. "Mrs. Willoughby, have you read *The Sorrows of Werther*?"

"No," I replied; "but I have heard it is a book full of overstrained sentiment that is having a very unwholesome influence on many young people."

Mr. Pierrepont shook his head lackadaisically.

"Ah, my dear madam," he said, "you should not judge a book, any more than a person, by hearsay. It is a wonderful reflection of a certain temper of the times."

"Good Heavens!" someone exclaimed, "how frightfully hungry they must be. Look how the little savages tear the meat. I declare I cannot bear to see it."

The lady turned away from the window and took out her scent-bottle.

"You haven't inquired if they like mustard with their sandwiches," said the young man who was carving the beef, to Barbara. "Hulloa!" he added, holding the carving knife suspended in the air, "here come some of those hulking, threatening-looking fellows we saw at the street corners as we drove into the town. Miss Mervyn, you had better come away from the window."

But Barbara was undaunted by the arrival on the scene of an adult contingent.

"Bring that tiny, curly-headed boy closer," she called in her silvery tones. "He has had nothing yet. Come, little boy."

The child did not move till he was hustled forward by some of the bigger children and fell against the window. His small face was bony, white and pinched, and he had dark rims round his eyes, but he was cleaner and better dressed than the rest. Barbara leaned out, and bending over him put a sandwich into his thin hand, and closed his passive fingers on it.

"There, little boy, eat it up as fast as you like. What pretty yellow curls he's got," she added, passing the lash of her whip caressingly over them.

The little fellow eagerly eyed the spongy new bread and was going to lift it to his lips when he changed his mind and murmured,—

"I'll take it home to my mammy."

"Will you!" shouted one of the new-comers in an angry voice. "I'd rather see you and your mammy starve than either of you should swallow a crumb thrown to you by bloated aristocratic folks like them there?"

Scattering the crowd of ragamuffins with his elbows, the man came under the window. He lifted the boy in his arms, snatched the food out of his hand and hurled it on the ground.

"Tut, man!" cried another voice, "the lass is Sir Melville Mervyn's daughter and she has a bonnie smile."

"Well, and what of that? Ain't her father a bloated landlord, living in the lap of luxury? Ain't he employing people from London to light up his park and to build a stage there when the labourers at his gates have naught to fill their stomachs with, not even dry bread?"

"Ay, but he don't set about man-traps and spring-guns in his woods, and that's something to be said in his favour."

"Like enough he'd do it if it weren't for Squire Willoughby—Squire Willoughby is the only gent in these parts as has got one drop of the milk of human kindness in his confounded blue blood."

Then surly, growling voices joined in the discussion, and I gathered that the majority of the disputants took the same view as the father who had so aggressively declined Barbara's charity on his son's behalf.

"Come away from the window, Barbara, dear," I besought her, but she still stood her ground, though the bright eagerness had faded from her face, and she had become pale and thoughtful. I do not know what might have happened if the innkeeper had not come and insisted on closing the windows.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said, "I entreat you to go into my parlour at the back and wait till these people disperse. There is a mania abroad in the town just now for stones and brickbat throwing, and if once it begins outside here, I shall not have a whole pane of glass left."

When at last we ventured out by way of the courtyard behind the inn, our spirits were all somewhat subdued. After what had passed I felt little heart or inclination to do the honours of the old Jacobean bridge, and to tell the story of its little round tower, supposed once to have been a chapel, in which my husband, in his youth, had been locked up for the night and guarded by soldiers on the occasion he was taken by the press-gang. Everyone, I think, found it a relief to be driving again instead of roaming about the picturesque terraced town on foot. The greystone houses with mullion windows, brightened with festoons of crimson Virginian

creeper, the old lichen-covered walls and emerald lawns, received scant attention, and it was not till we were nearly at Shockerwick that conversation and laughter revived.

Shockerwick was the seat of the great carrier, Mr. Wiltshire, who, when Mr. Gainsborough lived at the Circus in Bath, painting all the fashionable beauties there, had, from love of art, refused to charge the artist a penny for conveying his pictures to London. As a return for this generosity, Mr. Gainsborough presented the carrier with six of his pictures, and one of these was the portrait of the dear old friend of my childhood, Mr. Orpin, the parish clerk of Bradford, and another was the "The Harvest Waggon."

The Wiltshire family were absent from home, but Mr. Pierrepont sent in his own and Lady Mervyn's cards, and we were admitted to view the pictures. They hung in a long gallery, and I at once discovered the fine old face of my friend. So lifelike was it, that I almost expected to hear his voice speaking to me across the years, telling me what great and beautiful words there were in the book on which his hand was reverently laid. I saw myself very vividly once more a child of seven years old, showing Mr. Orpin my dead young mother's hair in the locket with the "teeny teeny" pearl. These reminiscences and many others rushed over me; it was like waking from a dream to be roused by Mr. Pierrepont saying,—

"You seem enthralled by the good clerk, Mrs. Willoughby, but really 'The Harvest Waggon' is worthy of your notice too. The two rustic maidens were Mr. Gainsborough's own daughters, and the cart itself was the carrier's."

"I knew the original Mr. Orpin long ago," I said; "that is why I linger here; it is like meeting an old friend, to see his picture. It recalls the past and the stories he used to tell me of the great Mr. Gainsborough."

"Ah! I have often heard my father speak of the good old Bradford clerk, his noble head, and melodious voice in reading," Mr. Pierrepont replied. "We natives of these parts may think with pride of the subjects we supplied the great painter's brush. Many of his finest landscapes were taken from sunny nooks and dales in this charming valley of Avon. You know that in spite of his great reputation as a portrait-painter, Gainsborough set far greater value on such landscapes as 'The Harvest Waggon.' He was prouder of reproducing the grand old trees of Shockerwick than of perpetuating for posterity statesmen, actors and exquisite ladies."

I knew as much from what Mr. Orpin had told me. I preferred the Mr. Pierrepont who talked thus to the Mr. Pierrepont who aired his knowledge of continental literature or rolled his eyes at Barbara and expressed himself in extravagant imagery. He could converse on English art and English scenery without affectation.

As we stood under the wide-spreading trees without, we heard the distant caw of home-flying rooks. The long rays of the western sunlight pierced the branches and lay in bands on the green turf at our feet. I liked to think that the eyes of the great artist had rested often on such a scene of idyllic eventide peace and beauty as he stood on this very spot.

"It must have been a great refreshment for him who so dearly loved trees and fields to escape from the whirl

of fashion at 'The Bath,' and to come here to commune with his mistress, Nature," Mr. Pierrepont remarked; "he could have enjoyed little quiet in his own house in the Bath Circus which his passion for the sister-art had led him to fill with professors of the violin, viola da gamba and hautboy, and a strolling Welsh harper."

A few minutes later we were driving away from the Shockerwick Mansion in the direction of Kingston House.

"We are all going to heaven, and Vandyke is of the company," murmured Mr. Pierrepont, quoting the last words spoken on earth by Mr. Gainsborough to his great rival Sir Joshua Reynolds.

"Gracious!" exclaimed the same lady who had produced her smelling-bottle to soothe her nerves at the inn, "I don't consider your Bradford, with those dangerous people about, *heaven*. Far from it! I declare I wish we were going home by another road."

The poor lady's mistake caused a good deal of merriment, and she was asked which of our party answered to Vandyke, at which she looked very bewildered and said she hadn't a notion what we were talking about.

At Kingston House, once the home of the Dukes of Kingston, the palace of my childish dreams, we were courteously received by Mr. Pierrepont's father (lately raised to the peerage, by Mr. Pitt, as Earl Manvers), and by his sisters and elder brother. A dainty *al fresco* supper had been prepared for us on the beautiful terrace with its carved stone balustrades and wide flight of steps leading to the lawn. By the light of the golden harvest-moon and wax candles we sat down to do justice

to the meal, and afterwards went into the house to look at the handsome and curious old chimney-pieces for which it was celebrated.

Such a day as I have described was typical of the way in which the country gentry of those days passed their time when not in town. If shooting and hunting were not the order of the day, it was a constant round of excursions, picnics, driving and visiting. An outdoor theatre entertainment was something more of a novelty, and so the forthcoming masque at Bromley Park was causing a deal of anticipatory comment and excitement in the neighbourhood. A change in the weather would have been fatal to its success, but when the eventful night arrived the sky was cloudless and starlit, and scarcely a breath stirred the foliage. Everything was propitious.

So soon as darkness fell, hundreds of twinkling lights shone out from the trees and shrubs, and at the point where Bromley Park merged into our grounds there was no break in the illumination, for both domains had been converted into an enchanted scene from the *Arabian Nights*. The house and the artificial water blazed in the chameleon-hued splendour of coloured fires. A long-disused fountain had been set in play for the occasion, and its spirals of foam darted high in the air, changing from ruby to sapphire, from topaz to amethyst and back again to the transparent whiteness of crystal. Instead of a loud military band, skilled musicians on the strings gave forth soft and ravishing strains from different parts of the garden, but naturally the centre of attraction was the bowling green, and here a brilliant crowd assembled at the time fixed for the masque to begin.

Lady Mervyn had been less exclusive in her invitations than was then customary for a hostess holding her position in the society of the county. Professional men such as attorneys and practitioners, with their wives and daughters, delighted and proud at being invited, chartered and shared conveyances from Bradford, Melksham and Box, and among the throng of fashionably-attired guests who streamed from the French windows onto the grass, having been received indoors by Lady Mervyn and Sir Melville, were a number of curiously out-of-date figures, in costumes which, as the saying goes, looked as if they had issued from the Ark. Never before had such a scene of magic spread itself before their astonished gaze, and probably never would again, and the memory of it was to be cherished to the end of many a dull and humdrum life.

The lights and the music, the jewels and floating gossamer scarves of the fair ladies were almost too much for poor old Miss Betty Castle, who made the tour of the garden leaning on my arm and a stick, in a complete ecstasy of delight. As for dear Tilly, she was content to view the fairy-like pageant from the windows, saying she had no wish to see sweet Miss Barbara dressed up as Night or as anything but her own pretty self.

Virginia's labours as stage-manageress were rewarded, for the entertainment, ambitious as it was, promised to go without a hitch. She herself opened it with a prologue spoken with an archness and finish that fairly amazed the audience. Besides the natural canopy of dark-blue sky and the background of laurel hedge and rolling woodlands, there was elaborate artificial scenery. One side of the stage was a green vale, all brightness

and sunshine, representing the bower of Flora; on the other side, beneath sable clouds, was the House of Night, with black, stately columns, studded with golden stars within; it was full of fleecy clouds and twinkling stars, while about it were arranged, on invisible wire, bats and owls, continually moving. Flora and Zephyr were seen gathering roses in the bower and throwing them into baskets held by two Silvans, singing,—

“Now hath Flora robbed her bowers
To befriend this place with flowers;
Strew about! Strew about!
Divers, divers flowers affect,
For some private dear respect,
Strew about! Strew about!
But he's none of Flora's friend
That will not the rose commend,
Strew about! Strew about!”

While Night was appearing in her house, her long, dark hair bespangled with gold—attended by her Hours, each bearing a lighted black torch, a playful dialogue, which I have reason to remember, though not for its own sake, passed between a Silvan and an Hour. I will set it down here as it will give some idea, perhaps, of a poetic taste even then long outlived.

Silvan. “Tell me, gentle Hour of Night,
Wherein dost thou most delight?”

Hour. “Not in sleep.”

Silvan. “Wherein, then?”

Hour. “In the frolic view of men.”

Silvan. “Lov'st thou music?”

Hour. “Oh! 'tis sweet.”

Silvan. “What's dancing?”

Hour. “E'en the mirth of feet.”

Silvan. "Joy you in fairies and in elves?"

Hour. "We are of that sort ourselves."

Silvan. "Life is fullest of content
When delight is innocent."

Hour. "Pleasure must vary, not be long;
Come, then, let's close and end the song!"

Clear, bell-like voices joined in the chorus, but I heard no more, for at that moment one of the servants came to my husband, who was sitting next me, and whispered something in his ear,—

"Lady Mervyn wants to speak to me," Roland said in a low tone. "My uncle is not well."

He left his seat and followed the servant. I remained, but the rest of the masque was for me a meaningless phantasmagoria on which my eyes were fixed, but which my senses did not grasp. Instinctively I felt some great change was pending, and that sorrow was casting its shadow on this bright scene of revelry. And truly it was so, for the uninvited guest, who knocks alike at the door of the cottage and the palace, had come this very evening to Bromley Park.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE RETURN OF THE HEIR.

As I look back on my life, the masque stands out in it as another of those milestones that mark the close of an epoch of happiness and calm, and usher in, as it were, a period of changes and heavy trials. Then the blow that fell on my dear Lady Mervyn that August night was the foreshadowing for me of the crushing sorrow that awaited myself.

Early in the entertainment Sir Melville had complained of sharp pains in his head and had withdrawn to the library, where, the whole household being out of doors, he must have lain a considerable time before he was discovered, as the doctor said when he came, unconscious from the effects of an apoplectic seizure.

Long after the performance had begun, Lady Mervyn noticed that her husband had absented himself from the onlookers, and slipped away herself to inquire the reason. It was then the servant came to summon my husband, and I was left to watch the play with unseeing eyes, overtaken by that mysterious, undefinable presentiment of coming misfortune, which is so difficult to describe and yet is so real.

To the sound of departing carriage-wheels, and before the lights on the rustling boughs had burnt out, good, kind Sir Melville Mervyn passed away without

regaining consciousness. Roland and I shared the vigil of his wife and daughter, while Virginia, with admirable collectedness, made all the necessary arrangements for the prompt breaking-up of the house-party at an early hour the next morning. Virginia, indeed, seemed to have developed administrative abilities, since her brief and disappointing encounter with the difficulties of theatrical life, which I had never before had any idea she possessed. I cannot speak too highly of the tact and delicacy she displayed in the position in which she was now placed, and even Roland did not withhold from her his praise. Thus it happened that Virginia stayed on indefinitely at Bromley Park after the funeral, as both Lady Mervyn and Barbara seemed to find her presence in the house a comfort and solace to them in their time of sorrow.

My dear Lady Mervyn was wonderfully sustained in the early days of her bereavement by her simple and beautiful faith. She said little, but I knew that it was only by constant prayer that she was strengthened to rise calmly from her grief and to face a new future for Barbara's sake. Hers was the unostentatious piety of a true Christian gentlewoman, to whom the parade of religion was as distasteful as the parade of birth or riches. She spent many hours closeted with the family lawyer and Roland, winding up Sir Melville's affairs and preparing for the return of Mr. Mervyn, now Sir Edgar, who had sent word that he was on his way home.

Lady Mervyn had every intention of receiving her stepson with kindness and then vacating, in his favour, the beautiful home of which she had so long been the graceful mistress.

The thought of losing her and Barbara, and having instead as our neighbour Mr. Mervyn, the reformed rake, was almost intolerable to me, and I was sure Roland anticipated trouble and looked forward to the change with grave anxiety.

"I think of retiring to a small estate of my own," Lady Mervyn said to me one day. "It is situated near Cobham, which is not far from London. The surroundings are not so lovely as these, and the house is an unpretentious old manor, very different from this. I lived part of my girlhood there, and I think the pure country air will suit Barbara better than living altogether in London. But I must go there for the sake of society sometimes, as my girl is too young yet to become quite a hermit."

"You know, mamma," Barbara said earnestly, "I shall never want to be gay any more. I have had enough balls and pleasuring to last me for ever. Let me be all in all to you, dearest of mothers, whether in the town or the country, I don't care where."

"You will not think like this always, dear child," replied Lady Mervyn, "and it would not be natural or right if you did. It is not fair to youth for us elders to blight it with our sorrows and world-weariness."

"But I mean what I say, mamma, for all that," exclaimed Barbara, and there was an eager, passionate seriousness in her tone as she threw her arms round her mother; and though it was no longer the chubby, childish face that nestled against her, Lady Mervyn's head, still charming, bent over it with the same maternal fondness as on the day years ago when Mr. Romney had ex-

claimed, "Madam, do not move," in delight at her attitude.

I had noticed a change in Barbara some time before the sudden death of Sir Melville had plunged her into girlish grief. Certainly she had looked less bright and blooming and had become quieter and more thoughtful in her manner, and I dated the difference from that expedition to Bradford, when she fed the hungry children from the inn window and her young, laughing eyes all unawares were rudely confronted with a glimpse into the hard realities of life. But later I learnt there was another cause. Mr. Reginald Pierrepont had, it seemed, very wrongly abused his privileges as a guest in Sir Melville Mervyn's house, making stormy and extravagant declarations of love to the young and simple girl, which at first amused and then frightened her. At different times I heard the story from both Barbara and Lady Mervyn. He had begun by saying he knew it was as useless to aspire to her hand as to cry for the moon. Was he not a younger son with no portion but his brains? Had he been heir to vast acres and a title he might have had more chance. Yet how could he bask day after day in the sunshine of her smiles, and not speak of his love, and his adoration for the very ground she trod on?

"He went down on his knees and asked to be allowed to keep a petal of a rose I wore in my hair," Barbara narrated. "I thought it too ridiculous of him and laughed. I liked him very much before, when he criticised my verses sensibly and vowed that, by my leave, he would enshrine one in the play he was writing. That flattered me, perhaps, for I knew him to be a

judge of poetry and acquainted with the best. But falling in love is so stupid, it spoils everything. At last he reproached me, said I was cruel and—and threatened—”

Barbara's voice faltered and she broke off, but I could supply the words she would have spoken—

“To drown or shoot himself,” I said lightly, knowing that Reginald Pierrepont had probably threatened to emulate the Werther type of hero he had assured me was then the mode.

“Yes, Marjorie. Why do men say such dreadful things? Why do they tear their hair and roll their eyes? It is terrible; I hate it.”

Though she assumed a mocking tone, I saw there was a shadow on the dear child's face, so I said, laughing,—

“Men, Barbara, men! They are not men but cowards who take advantage of a girl's sympathy, and of her softness of heart, by wringing it in such a fashion.”

I did not wonder at Lady Mervyn's indignation at Mr. Pierrepont's conduct and breach of trust. Very differently, she told me, had Barbara's young soldier-lover acted. On the eve of the departure of his regiment for Spain he had spoken modestly to Lady Mervyn of his love for Barbara, and said her bright image would ever float before him in the midst of the din and turmoil of war.

“But,” he had added, “I know I am young and untried. Perhaps, when I come home, I shall have won my spurs and you will permit me to pay my addresses. Should I fall under my baptism of fire, then you will tell her, madam, that I died with her name on my lips, for so it will be.”

Tears stood in Lady Mervyn's eyes as she repeated these words.

"God grant," she said, "that the brave lad may come home safely and find my child heart-whole, for I do not believe Reginald Pierrepont's extravagant ravings have made any deep impression, and very thankful I am that it is so."

The winter of that year was one of unexampled severity and distress. The snow stood as high as the door-knockers for weeks together, and even between us and Bromley Park communication was almost cut off. Barbara, it is true, ploughed her way through the drifts, muffled in hood and furs, by way of the small gate through which I had first trespassed on my husband's grounds. But of Lady Mervyn and Virginia I had seen nothing for a fortnight, when one day, to my surprise, the latter and not Barbara braved the elements, and came to pay me a visit. She threw off her heavy scarlet pelisse and tippet of soft grey fur, and revealed beneath one of the muslin toilettes, with fine lace and lavender ribbons, of which she was extravagantly fond. Her feet, in elegant sandal slippers, were drawn from the thick overshoes, and placed on the hearth to warm.

"How nicely the snow has powdered my hair," she remarked, looking at herself in a round mirror in a recess above the chimney-piece. "I declare it becomes me, if only it would stay; but when it melts, my poor locks will be in a sorry plight of lankness and dishevelment. Come, Marjorie, whisk off the flakes for me very lightly with that cobwebby lace handkerchief you are holding so daintily in your hand to be admired."

I performed the office, and then Virginia yawned

and confessed that she had come out in such inclement weather because she was finding it far from lively being snowed up in even a big, luxurious house like Bromley Park.

"Barbara has a cold and is in bed, being doctored by Pearson with possets and cordials. It is very *triste* indoors, and Lady Mervyn is quieter and graver than ever. Of course, it is only natural as she has so recently become a widow, and she and good Sir Melville were a devoted pair. You mustn't think I am complaining of my hostess, Marjorie. You know I have grown to appreciate her since the days when, as a silly girl, I was, through my own fault, an invalid in her house, and a very fractious and trying one, too, as you can testify. What ages ago it seems, doesn't it? Lady Mervyn is a good, sweet creature, and her society I have found refreshingly restful after the sort of people I had to associate with when I was on the stage. But I suppose I am still the same contrary nature as ever, for here I am pining for fresh faces; and reading aloud *Cælebs in Search of a Wife* and Southey's *Curse of Kehama*, while Lady Mervyn and Barbara stitch flannel petticoats for the deserving poor, is beginning to give me the blues."

"I am afraid," I said, "I have no more diverting occupation to offer you here. My husband has gone to Melksham, and I have been superintending the making of soup, which the steward's wife is to distribute to the frozen poor, whether deserving or undeserving."

Virginia made a grimace, and said,—

"Never mind the poor now, Marjorie; instead, bestow your charity on me, I want to talk to you about the

coming event. In expectation of it I can support any amount of dulness."

"And what event may that be?" I asked.

"Don't feign ignorance, Marjorie; I am sure you must be looking forward with almost as much excitement as I am to the return of Edgar Mervyn. Certainly it will be more awkward for you than for me to meet him again, considering the circumstances under which you parted."

It was true that I had been wondering how I should be able to meet Sir Edgar Mervyn without betraying signs that I still associated him with the terrors of the night in Windsor Forest, when I had escaped from his clutches, like a bird from the snare of the fowler. Though so many years had passed since then, I was as sensitive as ever to any light allusion to that adventure of my innocent girlhood.

"The past is best forgotten, Virginia," I said, "when it is not pleasant to recall. Both Roland and I have agreed to receive our neighbour and relative with as good a grace as possible, for Sir Melville's sake."

"You are very forgiving people, certainly," Virginia said. "Lady Mervyn is the same; she is quite ready to kill the fatted calf, and to fall on the neck of her prodigal stepson. I, for my part, shall be amused to look on and see how he plays the part of penitent."

The snow had begun to fall heavily again, and Virginia ceased to speculate on the heir's return, to exclaim in alarm at the size of the flakes whirling against the windows.

"Look how dark it is becoming too," she said. "Marjorie, you must keep me for the night. I dare not

venture forth in such a storm. Who would have believed there could be any more snow in the heavens left to fall!"

When Roland came in, his face was very serious, and it did not brighten at the sight of Virginia's festive figure reclining in his own particular easy-chair. He left the room to remove his snow-laden riding-coat and boots, and beckoned me to follow him.

"It has been a very hard day, Marjorie," he said. "Several heavy sentences were passed at the Sessions, for poaching offences, of course. You know how it goes to my heart to be a party to the administration of laws I consider unjust and inhuman. And now I have just come from the cottage of one of the Bromley Park keepers, where a man is dying from the effects of a blow on the temples received in a fray between a body of poachers and keepers on the evening of Saturday se'n-night. No firearms were used, but sticks and bludgeons. So great was the confusion, that the poachers often struck each other in mistake for their opponents. The injured man, James Bowles, may not have been hit by the keepers at all, and he himself does not blame them, because he says they gave him and his comrades due warning not to resist."

"Oh, Roland," I said, "these terrible tragedies seem to be on the increase. Think of Jim Bowles's poor wife. It was only last year her eldest boy was imprisoned for keeping wires for catching hares, and one of the younger children died of fever—and now her husband. Poor thing, how I feel for her! Did the other men escape?"

"Two of them took to flight, but the other three were captured and taken to Melksham Prison. This

perpetual warfare between keepers and the peasantry is becoming the curse of country life, and those who legislate against poaching, instead of putting it down, make things ten times worse, rousing all the latent hate and ferocity in the villagers' nature. It is true that we have not been so bad here as on properties where the game-keepers have *carte blanche* to resort to any violent measures they choose, no matter how cruel and barbarous, to keep the poachers at bay, but I am very much afraid that this sad affair may create bad blood and lead to fresh trouble."

I was grieved to see lines of care and anxiety on my Roland's fine brow, and still more grieved for the cause of their presence there. Yet I would not for the world have wished him to be callous and indifferent to the sufferings of the poor around him. To him the rustic, poacher or no, had a soul, and therefore he set more value on his life than on the preserving of the lives of pheasants and partridges for the lords of the soil to exterminate at their pleasure. Roland was fond of all healthy athletic exercise, and from his boyhood had been a sportsman. He believed field-sports to be a wholesome antidote to the dissipation of towns, nevertheless he had more conscience and regard for justice than the squirarchy of the day, and his soul revolted against sending a poor man to gaol for breaking through a hedge, when the avenging squire, who sat in judgment on him, was licensed, with his hounds, to trample down gardens and orchards, and to ruin perhaps in one day as much wheat and grain as would keep a whole village in food for a year.

I pictured the desolation of the Bowles's home. The

half-clothed children whimpering with cold and hunger, the poor, heart-broken wife and mother, who, after days and nights of cruel suspense, during her husband's absence, had been told his fate perhaps too late to go and close his eyes.

I had forgotten Virginia's presence in the house, when her voice, singing a snatch of some old French song to the harpsichord, roused me from my reflections. I returned to the parlour, and told her the story my husband had just related to me. She continued to strum with one hand on the keys, and appeared quite unmoved and indifferent.

"As long as there is game, there will be poaching," she said. "And I suppose, unless there was something to go out and kill, gentlemen could not endure the country. You see, Marjorie, they can't net waistcoats and stitch samplers."

I made no further attempt to interest Virginia or to excite her sympathy in what concerned Roland and me so deeply. She was in one of her old frivolous humours, and it lasted till the next morning, when the snow had ceased to fall, but lay on the ground in such gigantic drifts that the short-cut by which Virginia had come was rendered impassable, and I ordered the carriage to take her to Bromley Park. I accompanied her, and on my way back called at the keeper Brown's house, where Jim Bowles had died in the night. His poor wife was there, sullen and dumb in her grief. She had resented all consolation offered her by the keeper's family, but when I sat down beside her, and took her hand in mine, she burst forth into a paroxysm of weeping.

"Jim was always a kind father," she sobbed. "He

couldn't abear to see the children starving, or he'd never have touched a bird or a rabbit, I know he wouldn't. He said to me, 'Liz, we must fill their stomachs somehow,' he said, and now there they are asking, 'Where's daddy? When's daddy coming home?' And he'll never come home any more."

"I am so sorry for you," I said. "You must let me be your friend and help you in your trouble."

I scarcely knew what else to say, but my words seemed to bring her some small comfort, for she looked up at me gratefully through her tears and said,—

"God bless you for speaking kind, Mistress Willoughby."

We did our best to befriend the Bowles family afterwards, but the eldest son who had been in prison, and the boy next him, stolidly refused overtures of help, and threatened vengeance on those who had slain their father. At the inquest, the prisoners, who were men from another village, gave evidence that the keepers were not more to blame than themselves, and attributed the disaster to their comrade's own imprudence, and as it was impossible to know who had dealt him the fatal blow, a verdict of manslaughter was returned against "some person or persons unknown."

I mention the matter here, because indirectly it has some bearing on later events.

The snow had melted away from the crests of the downs, and the first crocuses were piercing the dark earth like tiny swords of flame, by the time Sir Edgar Mervyn arrived from America. The exact day of his coming had not been known beforehand, so, though he had been long expected, the appearance of his post-

chaise at the park gates, followed by a cavalcade of servants and luggage, came on the household, after all, as something of a surprise.

It happened that I witnessed his arrival, for on that fair February afternoon I had been walking with Lady Mervyn in the grounds and had returned with her to the house. I remember I was arranging the snowdrops we had gathered on our walk in an old Nankin bowl, when Barbara flew to me with the news. My first impulse was to decamp through one of the French windows and run home, the old fear and mistrust of Edgar Mervyn seizing me at the thought of his near approach. Then I recollected how the lapse of years had changed circumstances and that I was no longer a timid, untried girl but a matron holding a certain position of dignity as Roland Willoughby's wife. Barbara left me to be the first with her mother to greet the arrivals, and I calmly continued my occupation of filling the bowl with moss and flowers. But Virginia, who had been hastily adjusting her toilette, rushed in and would not allow me to tarry.

"At last! at last!" she exclaimed, looking quite radiant. "I have already seen him from the window, mounting the steps of the portico. He is still handsome, Marjorie, though stouter than of yore. He has all the appearance of having sown and reaped the very last crop of his wild oats long ago. Come, you and I must assemble with the rest to bid him welcome."

She put her hand through my arm and led me to the hall. I wished my husband had been standing beside me instead of Virginia as Sir Edgar entered it, holding his boy by the hand. He embraced Lady

Mervyn and Barbara, and then, turning to us with a swift glance of recognition, he courteously kissed our hands and exchanged civilities.

"I am rejoiced to find the old house so little changed, my lady," he said to Lady Mervyn, "and its fair mistress and guests, too, seem unaffected by the march of time. The only thing that has grown out of knowledge is my sister. Somehow or other I have never pictured little Bébé a fine young woman."

"She is as tall as you, papa, but not so wide," said small Master Mervyn, measuring Barbara with a pair of the largest and most lustrous dark eyes I ever saw in a child's face.

His father laughed, and pushing the boy forward said,—

"Pay your respects, Stello, to your grandmother, your aunt and these ladies."

"You mean my step-grandmamma, sir," the child corrected, and then advanced to Lady Mervyn, holding up his rosy mouth to be kissed.

"What a darling!" Virginia exclaimed. "Has he not perfectly exquisite features, and such eyes!"

She caught Stello in her arms, but he wriggled out of them, and, with the challenge, "Catch me!" he ran off behind the carved oak chairs and under tables, emerging each time with a scream of delight at being pursued.

Virginia was not a child-lover, and in the old days, when it had been my joy to pet and amuse Bébé, she had shown but little interest in her, and complained that she was too much with Lady Mervyn. Now, however, she entered with zest into the mock chase of Stello.

Virginia Beauchamp may not have been a success as an actress on the public stage, but in private life there was no disputing she could use consummate art. She could play a *rôle* with such natural, easy grace that only the keenest observer would be likely to detect that it was not spontaneous or that she was acting at all. I had not forgotten that as a girl Virginia was wont to express in strong terms her dislike of Edgar Mervyn, yet I knew, on her own confession, that her motive for staying on through the winter had been curiosity to see him again, and now, before he had been scarcely ten minutes under the roof which he had once disgraced, I felt an uncomfortable conviction Virginia intended to make a bid for the favour of the new master of Bromley Park. What surer way was there to the heart of the father than by capturing that of the little son? It did not take long to discover that Sir Edgar idolised the boy. He answered only absently Lady Mervyn's kindly questions about his journey and his American home, while his eyes followed Stello as he dodged about the hall, affording Virginia every opportunity of displaying her supple, agile figure and graceful movements. Their romp terminated at last by Virginia lifting him, kicking with glee, on to the top of a cabinet of armour.

"Now then, little man," she exclaimed, "you are at my mercy. How will you get down?"

"I'll frow myself down," cried the child. "I will! I'll frow myself on your head and smover you."

The threat would probably have been carried out, had not Stello's black nurse glided swiftly forward from a corner where she had been crouching in an attitude of vigilance awaiting a command, so it was into her

strong arms the boy threw himself instead of on to Virginia's carefully-arranged curls. Poor Dinah was rewarded for her timely intervention by a succession of slaps on the face from her small master's hands, but she bore the chastisement with Sphinx-like imperturbability and resignation born of habit.

"Massa is tired," she crooned; "massa come to bed."

"Yes," said Lady Mervyn, gently, "I am sure Stello's nurse is right. The little fellow must require rest after travelling so far to-day. I will show him his nursery."

She led the way up the wide staircase, and Sir Edgar motioned the black woman to follow with the boy.

"I want that pretty lady who has been playing wif me to come too," cried Stello. "And I want Cocky and Gough."

"You young rascal," his father called after him, "you can't make a slave of every pretty lady you come across. Zambo shall bring Cocky, but Gough is in London." He then turned to Virginia and me, and said in explanation, "Cocky is a cockatoo of snowy plumage, who has survived the voyage over the Atlantic; several other pets died on the way."

"And Gough?" inquired Virginia. "Is Gough a pet too?"

Sir Edgar laughed.

"Not exactly," he said. "Gough is an excellent creature who manages my business affairs. Indeed, he can turn his hand to anything. In short, Gough is my factotum."

Was it that I possessed in more than an ordinary degree prophetic instinct, which made me at the mere mention of this name instantly feel vague forebodings

of trouble in connection with it? I remember I confided them to my husband as I stood that same evening alone with him beneath the clear primrose of the February sky. On leaving Bromley Park, I had taken the path over the fields that led to the highroad along which I knew I should meet Roland riding homewards from the inspection of some tumble-down cottages in an outlying hamlet.

"Sweetheart," he exclaimed, as he jumped from his horse, "how kind to come and meet me. Have you seen the new-comers, already they are the talk of the village?"

"Yes, Roland, and I am relieved that it is over—the first meeting. Oh, Roland, you look years younger than Edgar, and how glad I am you have not the past engraved on your face that he has. His little boy is very handsome. Poor little motherless thing! They call him Stello because of his great dark eyes shining like stars. And, Roland, Edgar mentioned a person, Gough by name, who manages his affairs. I hope he won't come here and—"

"Manage the estate as if it were a sugar plantation. Is that what you would say, little Cassandra?" said Roland, smiling down on me. "We won't meet misfortune half way, dear. Who knows but this very Mr. Gough may have worked my cousin's reformation and is a very worthy character."

He led his horse with one hand and with the other resting on my shoulder we strolled home together to pass one of those *tête-à-tête* evenings so precious to both of us. Alas! they were now numbered, though neither knew nor suspected it was so.

CHAPTER XVII.

MY CROWN OF SORROW.

WHETHER Sir Edgar Mervyn, now he was installed as master in the home of his ancestors, looked back across the gulf of years with regret on his wasted and disreputable youth, and on the sorrow he had caused that good and upright gentleman his father, I cannot say. Outwardly, at least, he showed little sign of being at all humbled and penitent. His air was nonchalant and at times *blasé*; but I had nothing to complain of in his manner towards myself. No look or word of his revived memories of what I desired to forget, and I was able to continue my constant intercourse with Lady Mervyn and Barbara so long as they remained at Bromley Park, going as freely to the house as before. Roland, too, at first found that things went more smoothly than he had expected. In dealing with the tenantry, Edgar deferred to his kinsman and consulted him in such matters as the cutting down of trees and making improvement in the stables. Through his marriage he had come into possession of large plantations in Maryland, so, irrespective of his ancestral inheritance, he was by no means poor. He talked of representing the county in Parliament and of purchasing a stud of hunters.

In the rooms which had been Bébé's nurseries, Stello reigned supreme, though the rule of the small autocrat

was not limited to one part of the house; he ran wild from top to bottom of it, and in the gardens and shrubbery too.

"He's as different a child from what dear Miss Barbara was at his age, as chalk from cheese," said Pearson. "And when he's in one of his tantrums he treats those poor black creatures shameful. To my way of thinking, a little English gentleman should be brought up among white Christians and not among blacks and heathens."

Little Stello had not enjoyed much "bringing-up" of any sort. His short life had been passed in a country whose heroic history bore on its face the dark blot of slavery which, owing to the silvery voice of good Mr. Wilberforce raised for so many years in burning protest, had only recently been abolished from our own statute book. The crack of the slave-driver's whip and the clank of manacles had been familiar sounds in Stello's baby ears. The child had a passionate southern temper, which no one had taught him to control, and when it burst forth, he belaboured with his tiny fists the patient negroes who worshipped him with dog-like devotion and fidelity.

Stello, abroad with his little retinue, added colour and picturesqueness to the grounds. He was fond of feeding the swans in the lake from which I had rescued Bébé on a memorable day in my life. Dinah, her ebony limbs gleaming through her beads and white cotton draperies, and the woolly-headed Zambo with Cocky, perched on his shoulder or wrist, kept careful watch that no mishap should befall their little master. Besides these faithful attendants, his father, Virginia and

Barbara often accompanied him on his rambles. Indeed, Virginia continued gallantly to keep up her part of Stello's favourite playmate. I say gallantly, because I saw as time went on it became more and more of an effort, and that sometimes she had difficulty in suppressing irritable exclamations, when her dainty laces were rumpled and her becoming coiffure unceremoniously disarranged by his impetuous hugs.

"Poor little Stello!" Lady Mervyn said to me once, as she and I watched Dinah's attempts, which he resisted with kicks and blows, to get him into an overcoat as a guard against taking cold after sunset. "He is sadly indulged and humoured. I tremble to think what he will grow up. Yet the child has an affectionate and loyal little heart. He never fails to inquire every morning at breakfast for his absent friend Mr. Gough. When he arrives, Stello will give him a rapturous welcome, I don't doubt."

"And when does he arrive?" I asked, feeling again the unaccountable misgivings associated with this name rise within me.

"I believe early next week," answered Lady Mervyn. "Edgar talks of superannuating Mr. Spafford who has acted so long as his father's and grandfather's agent, and appointing Mr. Gough instead. I hope it will answer, and that there will be no friction, for Roland's sake."

Lady Mervyn then went on to speak of her departure from Bromley Park, a mournful topic truly for me.

"The sooner Barbara and I are settled in our new home at Cobham the better, I am sure, will it be for

all, Marjorie," she said. "Edgar says he wishes we would stay, but I feel this kind of double *ménage* is a mistake. It is true he seems fonder of me and prouder of Barbara than in his younger days, when he was so sadly wild and proved such a disappointment to my dear husband. But I cannot altogether trust his professions of attachment, and would prefer to part while we are friends and before a serious difference has arisen between us. I feel this might happen at any time."

My friendship with Lady Mervyn had become part of my daily life, and I could not look forward to the wrench of parting with any feeling but those of deep emotion.

"Roland and I shall miss you so dreadfully," I said. "Everything must be different without you. I wish almost we too could leave the neighbourhood."

"No, Marjorie," Lady Mervyn said, "you have been too happy in your pretty home to wish really to leave it. We shall see each other very often, I hope. You must come and stay with us both at Cobham and in London, and I shall trust my Barbara to you for long visits, for I never forget that, but for you, I might not have her now to be the light of my eyes and the solace of my widowhood."

On her last evening at Bromley Park, my dear Lady Mervyn gave me as a farewell gift the small portrait of my husband by Mr. Gainsborough, taking it from the wall with her own hands.

"It is not of a size to be a pair to yours by Mr. Romney," she said, but you will like to hang it beside your own portrait, and I have often thought since my husband's death that you ought to possess the picture."

And indeed in days that were coming, it was a consolation to me to have in my possession the artist's presentment of those beloved features, as they had looked in youth when their owner had first smiled on me and unawares won my childish heart.

When Lady Mervyn and Barbara were gone, taking with them Primmer and Pearson, but none of the other servants, Virginia came to be my guest at Down House for awhile. It was hay-making time and Virginia was often to be seen in the fields, in a costume somewhat resembling an Arcadian shepherdess's. I fancied it was a relief to her that, since Mr. Gough's arrival, she was no longer in such request with Master Stello.

The tall, sallow man with hard, cynical lips was now first favourite, and he submitted to lying full length to be buried in the hay, a process which would have been disastrous to the effect of Virginia's gipsy straw-hat, perched so carefully at the most becoming angle on her head and tied under the chin with green ribbons. It must be confessed that Mr. Gough's countenance when he was engaged in playing games with the boy assumed a softer aspect, and that he looked almost amiable—I remember thinking this as I watched one afternoon from the parlour window of Miss Betty Castle's cottage the gambols of Stello and his long-legged friend in the hay. Then my attention was suddenly withdrawn from them to two figures pacing leisurely the path lying between the pleasance and the hay-field. They were Virginia and Sir Edgar Mervyn, and they appeared to be talking more earnestly together than was their custom.

"What a very elegant woman dear Miss Beauchamp is," remarked Miss Betty, looking through her field-glass,

a present from Roland, which gave her great delight. "I always shall think it was a pity she took up with the stage, instead of with a good husband."

"The good husband may come yet," I said, but I little thought that on that very evening Virginia was to accept an offer of marriage from Sir Edgar Mervyn.

She told me afterwards that this had happened, in a letter written from London, whither she had gone to be married privately from the house of one of her theatrical friends.

"It was on the tip of my tongue to tell you," Virginia wrote, "but you were so provokingly uninterested, Marjorie. You wouldn't give me the lead by asking questions, and yet I think you must have guessed. It is no use pretending there is any resemblance between a marriage like mine and yours. Love and romance don't come into it at all. I find I like Sir Edgar Mervyn well enough to be mistress of his beautiful home and to help him to reinstate himself in good society. I shall also do my duty as mother to his pretty boy. My mother, I must tell you, has shown that she has still some worldliness left, for she has given her consent to the union, and a trousseau, but she withholds her blessing. There are to be no guests, no flummery, no ringing of bells at my wedding. In that respect it *will* resemble yours though it will be even quieter. Dear Marjorie, I needn't ask you to come to it, as I shall so soon see you again, and have you for my sweet neighbour always. Tell Roland I intend to be quite Lady Bountiful to the poor

people and to distribute flannel petticoats like Lady Mervyn.—Yours as ever,

“VIRGINIA BEAUCHAMP.”

I felt a great deal more depressed than pleased at this announcement of Virginia's. How could I regard a loveless marriage with a man whose past she knew too well to be able to respect him as subject for congratulation? Moreover, I doubted Virginia's influence being the best for Edgar Mervyn. She was too impulsive and variable, too much a creature of whims to settle down restfully to the pursuits of country squiress. In spite of her promise to act Lady Bountiful, I feared mischief rather than benefit might arise from any attempts on her part to dispense charity; then I could not help thinking of her callous indifference on the snowy night last winter when I had told her poor Jim Bowles's tragic story.

While Sir Edgar was away in London, Mr. Gough took the reins of management into his own hands, and Roland, who had been withdrawing more and more of late from his post as active adviser, now ceased to interfere altogether in the affairs of the neighbouring domain in which he had so long taken an interest for his uncle's sake, who had never been slow to recognise his invaluable services.

Under the new *régime*, Sir Melville's aged steward and bailiffs were dismissed and not replaced by anyone but Mr. Gough, who appointed himself to those offices in addition to that of agent. It was evident that he intended to wage war to the knife against the poachers, and to resort to all those drastic measures from which

the more humane landlords shrank, knowing too well that such action only aggravated the bitterness between rich and poor, and increased existing evils. Now, for the first time on the Mervyn estates, beneath the heather and bracken, lay concealed such terrible and deadly instruments as spring-guns and steel traps awaiting the unwary trespasser. The knowledge of this spread like wildfire in the villages round and raised a spirit of fierce resistance. Roland felt bound to protest; but in vain, his words of warning and advice fell on unheeding ears.

Sir Edgar did not return home with his bride till some weeks after their marriage. It was like a dream to me to see Virginia filling my dear Lady Mervyn's place, and exercising her authority as mistress of Bromley Park. In her way, she played the hostess gracefully enough; but her way, I need not say, was very different from the elder Lady Mervyn's. With the servants she was exacting and exigent, and I heard through Tilly of many complaints and grumblings. I noticed, too, a change in Stello. The child seemed quieter and less brimming over with animal spirits. One day I met him with his dusky attendants in the park, and he ran to me and put his hand in mine.

"Stepmamma never plays wif me now," he said; "I fink my real mamma, who's buried in a deep hole in America, must have been kinder and prettier. Gough says she was the prettiest lady in the world and that she had eyes like mine. That's why Gough says when I look at him sometimes, 'Your muver's eyes!' and kisses me."

So Stello's innocent prattle revealed his friend's secret, and showed me why it was the hard, unbending man

became softened and even joyous in the little boy's society. He had loved the young Spanish mother who lay in a lonely grave on the other side of the Atlantic. I told Stello that my mother too had died before I could remember her, and he looked up at me with new interest in his great dark eyes.

"And did you like your stepmamma?" he asked.

"I never had one, Stello," I answered. "Would you like to come and see my chickens? I am going to feed them."

I took him with me and showed him my pets, and afterwards some of my treasures indoors, and gave him sweetmeats and milk. From that day, Stello and I, who had not had much to do with each other hitherto, became fast friends. In after years, when he was at Eton, he never forgot me, and I have several affectionate schoolboy scrawls from him thanking me for some book or birthday gift. I am always glad to think that, in spite of the drawbacks of his early life and surroundings, Stello grew up an honourable and high-principled youth of lovable disposition, worthy in every way of his grandfather's traditions.

And now I come to a long, long gap in my old diary—I turn over blank page after blank page, and at this distance of time still wonder how I shall have the courage to relate what is purposely left unrecorded there. Even up to this point my story has not been all of "fun and frolic," and perhaps it has already proved, in parts, disappointing to my little scribe, Phyllis Vernon. But as I said at the beginning, the lives of all of us are chequered and have their sorrows as well as joys; and, as in Mr. Gainsborough's landscapes, shadows mingle

with the sunshine. Most of us are conscious of one great, overwhelming grief that dwarfs all others, locked away in the sanctuary of our inmost soul, too sacred to be dragged into the publicity of ordinary conversation. I have ever shrunk from talking or writing of mine, but as almost unconsciously I have cast my disjointed reminiscences into the shape of a consecutive narrative, I must now fill in those blank sheets, for what is not written on them is engraven indelibly on my memory.

The October of that year—the year of my sorrow—was brilliantly fine. A St. Luke's summer, with clear, sunny days and still, moonlit nights. Sir Edgar and Lady Mervyn were entertaining a party of guests for the shooting. The party consisted of two or three officers from the barracks at Devizes, an Oxford undergraduate, son of a neighbouring rector, and a German baron and his wife, acquaintances of Virginia's.

"Not a very interesting set," Virginia said. "After a season in town, I hope to do better next autumn."

Mr. Gough did not go out with the guns. He excused himself on the score of having too much business and correspondence to transact within doors.

One day I was returning from my daily visit to old Miss Betty Castle's cottage, when I saw the new agent leaning over a stile in conversation with my husband. They were both scanning a paper which Roland held in his hand. As I came up the agent turned to go, saying to me,—

"Mr. Willoughby and I have been differing on social questions. I have been advising him to enter Parliament to espouse there the cause of the distressed poacher.

He is certain of your support at anyrate, Mrs. Willoughby, I am sure, in such a noble undertaking."

I had no time to respond to the sneer, for with a low bow Mr. Gough walked away.

Roland still stood by the stile, with his eyes fixed on the paper.

"In giving a man like that unlimited power, my cousin is ruining his own interests," he said, after a silence. "His manner to the tenantry is as insolent and haughty as it would be had he Maryland negroes to deal with. In a short time he has undone the work of years, and his unwise repressive measures against poaching are raising a ferment in the district. With him will rest the responsibility of many a murder and midnight combat this season. And yet he sees fit to jibe and speak lightly of a document of this description."

I took the paper from Roland's hand and read,—

"Take Notice. We have lately heard and seen that there is an Act passed, that whatever poacher is caught destroying game is to be transported for seven years. *This is English liberty?*

"Now we do swear to each other that the first of our company that this law is inflicted on that there shall not one gentleman's seat in our county escape the rage of fire. We are nine in number, and we will burn every gentleman's house of note. The first that impeaches shall be shot. You may think it a threat, but you will find it reality. The game-laws were too severe before. The Lord of all men sent these animals for the peasants as well as the prince. God will not let His people be

oppressed, He will assist us in our undertaking, and we will execute it with caution."

I felt my face blanch as I read the anonymous circular.

"It is dreadful," I said. "And oh, Roland, Dick Bowles! is he not in Melksham Gaol at this very moment awaiting trial?"

"Yes; but I shall not be on the bench the day sentence is passed on him. I have resolved to have nothing to do with the administration of this new and outrageously stringent law. Unfortunately Edgar is likely to be a party to it, as that man Gough is doing his best to stir him from his natural indolence to attend to his duties as magistrate. I don't think, in my uncle's time, the most desperate ruffian would have dared send such an abominable threat as this to Bromley Park. But things are changed."

"Ah, yes, so changed!" I echoed.

"But, Marjorie, dearest, you are looking pale and frightened," Roland said. "I should not have shown you that." He drew the paper from my trembling fingers and tore it into small pieces. "I fear it has alarmed you, my dear one. Forget it. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof."

But I could not forget it, and on these bright, clear autumn mornings, when the guns were popping so gaily everywhere in the woodlands and on the moors, I reflected at what a cost the amusement was purchased—the cost of justice, mercy and humanity on the one side, and of the good-will and regard of the poorer classes on the other.

Ten days later it was in the Wiltshire news-sheets that Jim Bowles's eldest son, Richard, had been brought before Lord Elmore and Sir Edgar Mervyn, Bart., G. Cochrane, Esq., and others, convicted and sentenced to transportation.

Before it appeared in the papers, the news was known in the villages round, and, though expected, it fell on us with the force of a blow. On looking back on this period, events dovetail into each other with inevitable precision.

It seems a natural outcome of the cruel sentence passed on her son, that Mrs. Bowles should come and pour out this second grief to me. Plain to me now is the vision of her standing in the October twilight, with two whimpering, half-clothed children clinging to her skirts, tears raining down her furrowed, haggard cheeks.

"And this ain't the end; I've my t'other boy to lose," she sobbed, "and I shall lose him. Jack's thirsting for vengeance, he is. He's out with the gang this very night. There's up twenty of 'em and they means mischief." Then the poor woman in her despair turned informer against her son. "They means to do more than beat the keepers to-night," she went on. "They means to set yonder mansion afire." She jerked her head in the direction of Bromley Park. "Ah, now it's out! I've told on him. Told on my own son! Well, I'll just be off now, before I tell any more; but mark this, they are going to work as bold as lions."

She threw her ragged shawl over her head, and shuffled away. I went out into the pleasance, and I fancied I saw figures in the white evening mist creeping

along under the hedges in our meadows. Were they already on their way to the place of rendezvous?

Darkness had fallen when Roland came in. I ran to him and repeated Mrs. Bowles's wild story.

"Marjorie," he said, "not a moment must be lost; the alarm must be raised at Bromley, where they are quite unprepared for this. I passed the windows a few minutes ago, and saw my kinsman seated at the card-table with his guests. You need not be anxious, I shall not be long."

In another moment he was gone. He went out bare-headed and unarmed, taking the path through the grounds that led on to the Mervyn property, and as I saw him go I felt a great longing to run after him and cry, "Come back! come back! and send one of the servants."

Instead, I stood motionless on the spot where he had left me in the hall, listening to the slow, deliberate tick of the clock. An hour passed and I repeated several times mechanically to myself the assurance—he said he would not be long, he said he would not be long.

Then I heard the report of a gun. Was it a keeper firing on a poacher, or a poacher firing on a keeper? I wondered. I began to pace the hall uneasily, went into the dining-parlour where our untasted meal was spread, came again into the hall and sat for a few minutes on one of the oak settles. Ah! there was a step at last—not Roland's—but I flew all the same to the door, which was standing open, and met Virginia on the threshold—Virginia with a cloak and hood thrown hastily over her bare arms and shoulders, her satin slippers drenched with dew and stained with mud. I saw at once it was

not the gay, flippant Virginia, the Virginia that acted parts, who had come thus alone through the mists and moonlight on this night of peril; but Virginia the true woman, full of tender sympathy for me, the parson's daughter, the friend of her school-days and early girlhood, for whom she had kept a soft place in her heart, as she often told me, through all the changes and chances of her restless and unsatisfactory life.

"Darling Marjorie," said Virginia, very gently, leading me to the library, "something has happened, dear. Sit down and be very brave and I will try and tell you what it is."

I did not cry out or swoon, but I said quite calmly,—
"Something has happened to Roland."

"Yes," Virginia said. She took my impassive face between her hands and with her lips almost resting on mine she whispered, "He is still alive."

"Then let me go to him," I cried, springing up.
"Take me to him."

"He is being brought home, dear," Virginia said; "he was found lying unconscious outside the park gates, shot in the back by some dastardly wretch who has made off. I sat with him till the doctor came from Melksham, and then I came on to prepare you. There would have been too much risk in moving him without medical assistance."

Then Virginia summoned the servants and gave directions for a couch to be made ready in the library. A few minutes later the tread of feet was heard on the gravel without, and I saw my husband carried in beneath the motto—*Pax intrantibus, salus exeuntibus*—to which he had drawn my attention on just such a moonlight

autumn night as this when he had brought me home as his bride. The light of the flambeaux showed me his white face; the shadow of death was upon it, and one glance told me so.

A leading surgeon from Bath came to remove the shot lodged near my husband's spine, but though the operation was performed with skill, he never really rallied from the exhaustion caused by loss of blood. It is true that God in His great goodness spared him to me for yet three weeks longer, during which time I never left him day or night. In great weakness and suffering borne with sublime patience, he was ever conscious of my presence beside him, and drank in the verses I repeated from his favourite chapters of Isaiah and the poems of George Herbert. I cannot but look back with thankfulness on this time of leave-taking. Day after day I watched him drifting into another world, and it was granted me to accompany him as it were to the very gates of death. No earthly cares seemed to trouble him, though once he inquired who his assassin was, and on being told he had escaped, and had not been found he said,—

“That is well. I do not wish him punished.”

All this time Virginia remained in my house helping with the nursing and rendering me a thousand quiet services, with a deep, silent sympathy that I shall never forget. She did not say, “How terribly sad it is for you, Marjorie! How I pity you!” but her eyes expressed far more than such trite and feeble words. Her presence in the sick-room was a rest and comfort and never seemed to interrupt the perfect communion between me and the departing spirit of my beloved. She was there

when the end came in the chill dawn of a November morning. Roland opened his eyes as I had opened mine that day long ago—the day of my crowning happiness—on Mr. Romney's portrait which hung above the couch. He smiled the same beautiful smile that had so captivated Virginia and me when we were boarders at Miss Castle's and had first seen him in the clutches of the press-gang, and then his eyes dropped from the picture and fell on me kneeling beside him with my face pillowed on his hand.

"The parson's daughter," he murmured, "with the dear, rough hair."

His features shone with an unearthly radiance, and almost before the words died on his lips he passed into the great Beyond.

I buried my dear husband beside his mother in the old Norman parish church of Melksham. Sir Melville Mervyn lay not far off, with his ancestors, beneath a canopy of carved stone cherubs and armorial bearings.

It was some time afterwards that, in obedience to Tilly's exhortation, I was taking an airing one frosty day on the outskirts of my own grounds, when a rough-looking man jumped through a hedge and, tugging his moleskin cap, said,—

"Mrs. Willoughby, I'd like to speak a word with you. Don't look affrighted, I mean no harm to you. It's this I want to say. I shot Master Willoughby in mistake for Sir Edgar Mervyn, whose name stinks in the nostrils of every poor man between Bradford and Melksham because of the monstrous cruelty of him and the villain he calls his agent. Now, if you like you can give me

up to your keepers and I shall swing for it, but I swear again, Mistress Willoughby, before God, it was a mistake, and I would not for anything have shed the innocent blood of the only just landlord in the county intentionally. Now, then, cry out and someone will come fast enough to take me into custody. I am ready."

I did not cry out, but, controlling myself with a tremendous effort, I looked my husband's murderer straight in the face.

"He had no desire that you should be punished," I said. "So go—go right away across the seas to some new country where you will not be tempted to take the lives of your fellow-men, whether just or unjust. Go and lead a better life, for there is room in God's world for even you, and it is never too late."

My voice shook and nearly failed me, but he heard what I said, and his fierce, bold eyes fell before mine.

It happened that I had my purse in my reticule, for I had set out on my walk with the intention of visiting the hapless Bowles family, but as I neared their dwelling I had felt unequal to the meeting with the poor creature with whom destiny had associated me so much of late, and so had retraced my footsteps.

"Here, this will help you," I said, and I laid gold in his great horny palm. He eyed it for a moment greedily, and his fingers involuntarily closed over it, then suddenly he dashed the coin on the ground.

"I'll not touch a penny of your money," he said gruffly. "The words you've spoken are worth more to me. I'll remember them to my dying day, which, but for your mercy, Mistress Willoughby, might be not far off."

The next moment the brambles were crackling under

his heavy boots, and he disappeared through the gap in the hedge.

My knees trembled as I walked slowly homewards. I believed the man's story. It was not impossible that Roland should have been taken for his kinsman, for they were of the same height and, at a distance, not unlike. Hitherto it had been supposed my husband's life had been taken of intent, because he had given warning at Bromley Park and frustrated the designs of the incendiary gang. The knowledge that this was not the case, and that he was shot in mistake for another, I think, brought me some small consolation. It seemed less awful than if someone had meant to kill him.

The winter sun, like a disc of scarlet fire, was going down behind the downs; as I came to the pleasance, I heard Stello's merry laughter coming through the clear, still air from the lake where he was sliding, mingled with snatches of plantation melodies crooned by Dinah and Zambo, who crouched on the bank with chattering teeth.

"If only my children had lived," a voice within me cried, "I should not be so desolate now, and how much easier it would be to come back to the routine of life."

In my great loss my heart had yearned more than ever before over my dead babes. Now that he who had been lover, husband and comrade and loving counsellor to me for so long was gone, my arms ached to clasp in them a child of his and mine who would have called me by the blessed name of mother.

The shock of that afternoon's walk had quite unnerved me. Standing afterwards before the small picture in which the serene nobility of my husband's expression

had been so perfectly caught by Mr. Gainsborough, the long-frozen fount of my tears burst forth, and in a fit of passionate weeping I sank on the floor.

"At last! at last!" said good old Tilly, who stood by with a cordial. "Now my dearie will be better!"

And I was better; those tears brought me relief, and to a more resigned frame of mind. Not till I had shed them could I kneel in prayer and say humbly, "Thy will be done."

CHAPTER XVIII.

BARBARA'S WEDDING.

IN the year 1811 I let the Down House, and my tenant was Reginald Pierrepont, who had recovered from his hopeless attachment to Barbara, and since wooed and won simple little Nell Pearse, a younger sister of Virginia's old schoolfellow and mine, Dolly Pearse of Bradford. I think I should have clung to the home in which I had spent the happy years of my married life, and never have left it, had my neighbours at Bromley Park not become more and more uncongenial to me. Mr. Gough continued to manage, or rather mismanage, the estate with the same overbearing despotism, while its master lapsed into his old gambling habits, and played high with the somewhat shady guests who came and went under his roof. I grieve to say Virginia shared in the general deterioration. Her reckless and undisciplined nature was not one to rise above it. She was often away from home without her husband, and talked of going back to the stage. Her ambition to shine in county society as the lady of the reformed Sir Edgar was characteristically short-lived. She complained of the dulness of social magnates, and expressed her preference for the society of votaries of Art and the Drama. Many of these friends had known her as Madame Belton, and were people that I at no time should have cared to associate

with, but particularly did they jar on me at the period of my bereavement.

Virginia's duties as stepmother now began and ended with engaging first-rate governesses and tutors for little Stello, and in these the boy was fortunate. He was bright and quick to learn, and his father deemed him a genius.

"How I envy you, Marjorie," Virginia said to me on the eve of my departure. "Far rather would I that my husband had died, leaving behind him a clean and honourable memory, than that he should live and I despise him."

"You should not speak thus," I said. "You knew what Edgar had been when you swore to honour and obey him."

"Yes, I did it with my eyes open, my dear, I know that; and I was no chicken, either. I thought it would turn out as well as most marriages; and perhaps it has, which is not saying much. Such a prize as you drew, remember, is rare."

I have said, and I hope I have shown, that there was much to love in Virginia; then all the more did I deplore this assumption of a hard and flippant tone. To me her life seemed to have been a melancholy failure; but the outside world still regarded her as a very brilliant and effective person. She never entered a drawing-room, a church, or any public resort, without exciting the *éclat* she sought and would have been miserable without. A leader of fashion, Virginia was the despair of imitators, because she eschewed any mode, however fashionable, that did not become her. After I left my home in Wiltshire, I saw Virginia only rarely,

and she was a bad correspondent; so, as the years went on, we again drifted apart. Yet even now I feel sure I could count on Virginia's loyal affection and friendship for myself, and if in any trouble I should need her, she would come to me.

When I gave up the Down House I went to stay for a time with my cousin Letitia Dowling, *née* d'Eyncourt, in the Close at Salisbury, for her husband had been made a canon of the cathedral. Letitia was a complacent matron, mother of one little girl and five sturdy boys, the darning of whose stockings seemed an interminable business, for Letitia appeared to me to be constantly grappling with a pile of them. Letitia attended morning prayers at the cathedral every day, managed a clothing-club and a mothers' meeting, and in her quiet, unostentatious way was a busy woman.

She had a happy knack of keeping the boys quiet when her husband, a silent, grey-haired man, was in his study writing his sermons, and the two seemed perfectly satisfied with each other.

"My mother does not often come here," Letitia said. "She can't take kindly to the office of grandmother. She still looks much younger than I do; besides, we are not gay enough to please her."

I could well understand that Mrs. d'Eyncourt would find the sleepy, humdrum life of an old cathedral city little to her taste. The Dowlings entertained other cathedral dignitaries and their wives sometimes at dinner, and there was whist and chess in the evenings, but this was the limit of dissipation. I found, on the contrary, the old-world calm and peace of the grey precincts, the sound of cathedral bells, cawing of rooks, and

rippling water, soothing and in tune with my mood, and I was never tired of gazing at the delicate, lace-like spire of the cathedral piercing the sky above me.

At Salisbury I heard of the death of the poor little Princess Amelia, and of the shadow of insanity again creeping over the old king. But of events that were convulsing the Continent, of the war under which the country had so long been groaning, little was said, and home politics seldom formed the subject of conversation.

I think Letitia's life would have been too exclusive and narrow for me, and so, though I have always felt drawn to quiet old cathedral cities, I preferred to find an abiding-place in Bath to Salisbury. I was settled in the house in King Street where I am writing this, when a letter of Lady Mervyn's from London told me that she had given her consent to Barbara's engagement to Ensign Hugh Fitzherbert, the soldier-lover who had been fighting under the Duke of Wellington in Spain, and had come home with wounds and honours.

"It is an old-fashioned love match, as yours was, Marjorie," the dear lady wrote. "It does my heart good to see the children so happy, and to feel that I shall now have a son as well as a daughter. But both are so young the wedding will not be just yet."

As we grow old, time flies ever faster, the year of middle life being shorter than the month of childhood, so it seemed to me not very long after this letter came that I for the first time since I became a widow lessened my mourning and was travelling by coach along the Portsmouth Road, to be present at my Bébé's marriage in Cobham Church. They were an ideal pair of lovers,

Barbara and her blue-eyed, fair-haired Peninsular hero, both so tall and good to look upon.

Sir Edgar Mervyn and Virginia had been prevented, by a serious illness of little Stello's, from being present at the ceremony, and Barbara was given away by her mother. How wonderfully young she looked, my dear Lady Mervyn, without aping youthful dress and airs; though time had silvered her graceful head, soft roses bloomed in her sweet face that would not have shamed a maiden in her teens. The bridegroom came of a distinguished military stock, so there was quite a blaze of uniforms and orders in the old grey building. The ancient saying, "Happy the bride whom the sun shines upon," came involuntarily to the lips of many as Barbara in her bridal dress of purest white, a wreath of myrtle in her hair, stepped from the church into a flood of April sunlight. The children of Cobham, whose parents remembered the bride's mother at her age, a slim young girl, scattered flowers in her path, and the bells clanged out a merry peal.

Barbara, a wife! the tiny Bébé who had trotted behind me on my own bridal morning. It was hard to realise it, although I had just seen her kneeling at the altar and heard her speak her marriage vows in a clear, resolute young voice. I was alone in the low-ceilinged oak parlour of the Manor, whither I had withdrawn from the rest of the wedding guests, because I felt the tears I could not keep back would be out of place in that happy gathering on the lawn. I had taken up a copy of *The Lady of the Lake*, a wedding present from Hugh Fitzherbert's commanding officer, and was looking at the inscription on the fly-leaf, reminding him of the winter

night on the heights of Torres-Vedras, on which the colonel had stirred the spirit of the regiment by reading aloud the great battle-scene in the poem, when someone tripped through the long glass doors that opened onto the garden.

"Lady Mervyn tells me," said a sweet, low voice, "that you are Mr. Romney's 'Parson's Daughter.' I remember seeing your picture one day in his studio, for in my youth I, too, was painted by Mr. Romney."

The speaker was a charming apparition with masses of blonde hair, and a complexion so delicate that, in harmony with the soft, pale lavender of her airy costume, it gave a sort of opalesque effect to her whole appearance.

"I should so much enjoy a chat with you," she said, and we sat down together in a cushioned recess. "First I ought to introduce myself properly. I was Bessie Close of Easby in Yorkshire, now I am the wife of Mark Currie, a gentleman of Cobham. You, I think Lady Mervyn said, are the wife of a Mr. Roland Willoughby."

"I am his widow," I said.

There was no awkwardness in the pause that followed, for it was a pause made eloquent of sympathy by the expression of the lady's soft grey eyes. There are people whom from the first moment we hear their voices cease to be strangers to us. Thus it was with me and Mrs. Mark Currie. Whether it was the fact that we had both been sitters to Mr. Romney that drew us at once to each other I could not say, but certainly some remarkable affinity attracted me to this most charming woman. We had many reminiscences of the artist to exchange. We talked of his mobile face, his quickness

of touch in sketching, the wonderful *savoir faire* under which he hid his want of education and small reading.

Mrs. Currie asked me if I had ever seen his favourite model, the beautiful Emma, Lady Hamilton, and on my saying I had not, Mrs. Currie told me she once had happened to catch a glimpse of her.

"I saw her crossing the pavement to her chair," she said, "smiling back over her shoulder at Mr. Romney. It was the smile of a siren, and her figure was as sinuous as a serpent. I think Mr. Romney was infatuated, but not in love with her."

"You have of course read the Life pompous Mr. Hayley has written of Mr. Romney?" I asked.

"Yes," was Mrs. Currie's answer, "and I think our dear painter has been too severely handled in it with regard to his relations with his wife. When he left her in the North, so soon after their marriage, to try his fortune in London, he probably meant her to follow him if he succeeded. People assume that he did not allow her to do so, but she, being humbly born, may have felt she would be out of place in the society which a fashionable portrait-painter is bound to frequent, and would be only a hindrance to him. Yet it was amazingly unselfish of her to give him up so entirely to art."

"And their reunion at the end," said I, "when he was shattered in mind and body, and the fine ladies he painted had lost for him their charm and glamour, always seems to me so infinitely pathetic."

"Pathetic indeed! Poor Mr. Romney! I can picture his return to the small, jasmine-covered cottage at Kendal, weary and broken down. I have been told the wife he had been separated from for so long received him with

no reproaches, but with unbounded joy, and that she nursed him faithfully and with devotion till he died. Truly her price must have been above rubies."

My conversation with Mrs. Mark Currie must have lasted over an hour, and it was not the last I had with her before leaving Cobham.

I walked with Lady Mervyn one day through Surrey fields, in which the cowslips were tossing their meek heads, to visit my new friend in her pretty country home. She received us with all that candour and charm of manner which had won me so completely on the day of Barbara's wedding. She showed me her boys, three curly-haired cherubs, and her portrait—one of the most enchanting of Mr. Romney's masterpieces. What could exceed the easy, unaffected grace of that dainty seated figure in mellow-tinted white muslin and rose-coloured ribbons? The turn of the head, the veiled roguishness of the eyes, the well-moulded lips, and idly-drooping arms, the coquettish pose of the diminutive foot, these were but details of a perfect *ensemble*, conveying an idea of youth and freshness and of that incommunicable atmosphere of breeding and distinction which genius enabled the artist of low birth and little education to suggest so admirably in his portraits of gently-born Englishwomen.

And now the book bound in red morocco, into which Phyllis has been transcribing my story, is all but full, and this seems to me a signal that it is time I should bring it to a close, though the child asks for more and fain would have me extend it to a second, nay, a third volume. But I cannot expect everyone to be so indulgent

and interested a critic as she has been. Were I to continue, I might, it is true, find plenty to say, but, I fear, at the risk of being prosy and irrelevant.

The stories of other lives it is not for me to relate beyond the point where they affected mine. Therefore I will put away my old diaries and packets of musty letters and bid Phyllis inscribe "Finis" on the last fair page.

EPILOGUE.

I DID not write "Finis," on the last page of the red manuscript book, as desired by my dear kinswoman, Marjorie Willoughby, whom I always called grannie, for I hoped so much she would change her mind and write more. After the war, grannie went abroad and saw beautiful places and pictures. I know if she had tried she could have written stories about them too that would have interested everybody. While I lived with her in Bath, many of her old friends visited her. I saw there the fascinating Mrs. Mark Currie and Barbara Fitzherbert, whose husband had fought and been wounded again at Waterloo. Barbara brought her dear little girl, another Bébé, with her to Bath. The Dowager Lady Mervyn died before grannie. She was buried with Sir Melville at Melksham, and I have seen the tomb when I have been to look at grannie's and her husband Roland Willoughby's graves.

Grannie, at her death, bequeathed the portrait Mr. Romney painted of her to relatives of mine, and at their

house I still sometimes have the delight of looking on the sweet girlish face of my friend, now long dead, but alive for ever on the master's canvas. To me she left the dear red book containing the story of her life—a very precious possession, for I shall ever love to turn over its leaves and wander with her in the shady alleys and old-world by-ways of the past.

PHYLLIS VERNON.

BELGRAVE SQUARE,
LONDON, 1850.

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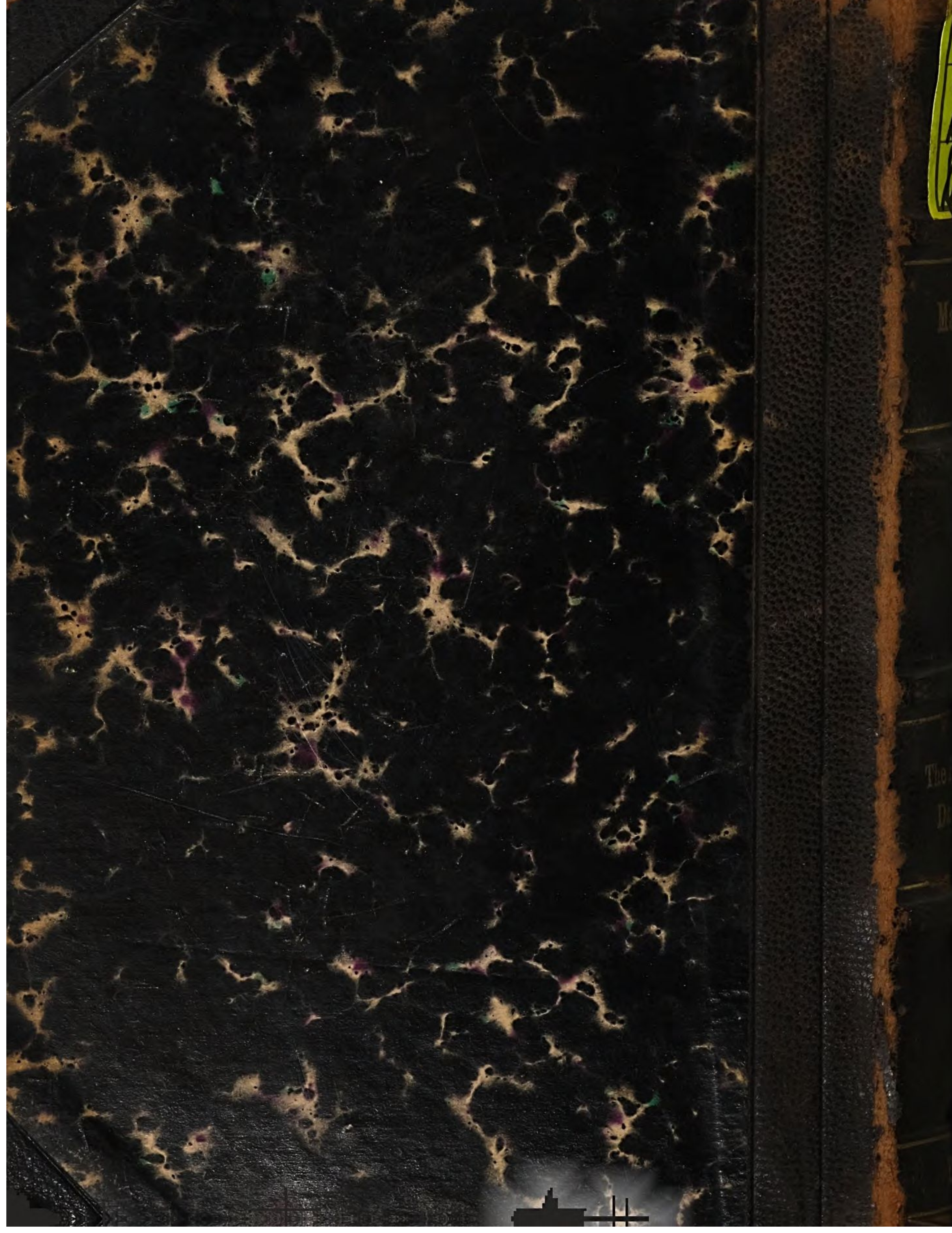
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